GMA offered to send Erap to US, Satur claims

Story below, Col. 4

KC Concepcion's column "Kulit Co." starts today in Saturday Special Super!

SEE PAGE L1

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Kangaroos 'waltzing' wild in Paris forest

VERSAILLES, France—It may not be the scorching Australian outback, but for dingoes, around 50 kangaroos that escaped a French animal park 30 years ago are happily living wild in a forest west of Paris.

KANGAROOS, A4

email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph | Saturday, November 15, 2003 | 36 pages / vol. 15 / no. 149 | website: www.inq7.net

MJ convicted: 2 years in jail, $1.2M in fines

MARK JIMENEZ: I admit I committed the crime and I am paying for it, thanks to the justice system of America."

SEE PAGE A22

Gutierrez, Demetriou trade barbs over Strunk

By Philip C. Tubeza and Leila Salaverria

THE BACK and forth has started in earnest.

An angry Justice Undersecretary Ma. Merceditas Gutierrez yesterday lashed out at critics, mainly Hartzell Demetriou, for blaming the Department of Justice for its "negligence" which led to the dismissal of the extradition request for Rod Lauren Strunk, prime suspect in the gruesome murder of his wife, actress Nida Blanca.

A former Court of Appeals justice and chair of the Commission on Elections, Demetriou is the lawyer of Estrada's daughter Kaye Tuvera.

On Wednesday, California's US District Court Judge Gregory Hollows denied the extradition of Strunk for lack of probable cause.

In his 27-page decision, Hollows called the government's evidence "a tangled web of accusation followed by supplementation, and amendments to further supplementation without regard to consistency of accusation." (See Page A22 for story on Hollows' decision.)

GUTIERREZ, A12

But ousted Manila solon to begin serving term on Jan. 5

By Carlito Pablo and Cynthia D. Balana

MARK Jimenez, disqualified from his congressional seat early this year for vote-buying, was convicted yesterday by a US court of electoral fraud.

The Southern District Court of Miami sentenced Jimenez to 27 months in prison after he pleaded guilty to election conspiracy and tax evasion charges. He was also ordered to pay $1.2 million in fines.

Interviewed on TV last night, Jimenez admitted his guilt. "Tinatanggap namin kung kinakailangan ko 'yun at pagkukulungan ko ang kinakailangan ko (I admit I committed the crime and I will be paying for it)," he said, before thanking the "justice system [of] America."

He said he will start serving his sentence on Jan. 5 as approved by the Miami court which considered his coming birthday on Dec. 31 and the Christmas holidays.

He said that the US justice department had recommended that instead of a prison, he be held instead in a camp without fences, watchers with tennis courts.

Asked if this didn't constitute VIP treatment, he said: "No, I didn't hurt anyone, the money came from my company."

Even though Jimenez, aka Mario Crespo,

HE CONVICTED, A22

Family of 7 butchered in Zamboanga Norte

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Nine months after a similarly harrowing attack on the town, suspected Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels killed a family of seven—six of them children aged 1 to 15—in Barangay Poblacion, Kalawit, Zamboanga del Norte, the military said yesterday.

Barely nine months ago, a similar attack by suspected MILF rebels in Kalawit's Tabod village left 14 people—including six children—dead and 10 others wounded.

Residents found the bodies of 40-year-old widow Evangeline Bellos and her children Daniel, 13; Ariel, 11; Danny, 8; Julita, 3; Ruby Boy, 2, and Mark, 1.

They had all been hacked to

FAMILY, A6

Gloria offered to send Erap to US, Satur claims

By Cynthia D. Balana, Juliet L. Javellana and Michael Lim Ubac

MALACAÑANG had offered to send deposed President Joseph Estrada to the United States for medical treatment as part of a political settlement, Bayan Muna party-list Rep. Satur Ocampo claimed yesterday.

The offer was part of President Macapagal-Arroyo's "total reconciliation" plan, Ocampo added.

Ocampo accused the President of conducting "dirty backstage political negotiations" as evidenced, he said, by Malacañang's pressure on government prosecutors to withdraw their opposition to Estrada's pending motion before the Sandiganbayan regarding his travel request.

Estrada vehemently denied that a deal had been struck (*See accompanying story*).

But the Palace chief of staff said the idea may be worth considering.

"Personally, I think that might not be a bad

GLORIA, A10

Kuratong cops: Stop endless persecution

By Christine O. Avendaño and Philip Tubeza

CLAIMING to be "pawns [in] the dirty game of politics," the police officers who have been virtually cleared of the charge of conspiring to murder 11 members of the Kuratong Baleleng criminal syndicate yesterday appealed for an end to what they called their "endless persecution."

At a news conference at the launch of a group calling itself the Lawyers' Assembly for Clean, Stable and Orderly Nation (Lacson) at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Malate, 11 of the 33 members of the police team that carried out the operation against the Kuratong Baleleng in 1995 asked the government to put the case to rest so that they could be free to lead "normal lives."

Opposition Sen. Panfilo Lacson, a principal accused in the

KURATONG, A6

"FLOATING" for the past eight years, some of the police officers (center, Chief Supt. Francisco Zubia in red checkered shirt) accused in the Kuratong Baleleng multiple murder case, which was dismissed by a Quezon City judge on Wednesday, ask to be returned to their normal duties during a news conference which also launched the Lawyers Assembly for Clean, Stable and Orderly Nation (Lacson).

PNOC bags int'l Oscar for solar power project

By Raneil Domingo

IN YET ANOTHER proof of Filipino excellence, the Philippine National Oil Co. won first prize in the Energy Globe Awards 2003 for its solar power project for rural homes.

The awards, presented in Linz, Austria last Wednesday, is considered the Oscars on the environment.

The organizers said they wanted to create publicity for projects that seek to conserve energy to protect the environment by combating global warming and the depletion of the earth's natural resources. This is the fourth year the awards have been handed out.

The PNOC was one of 30 winners that received a prize of 10,808 euros (approximately P643,808) and a 14-kg bronze statue of a hand holding a globe.

The PNOC hosted two other nominees for the Fire Category.

The Belgian firm Solarmundo's linear frontal solar power plant project won second prize while Danish firm Ehaan's Hanso Bay offshore wind farm project won third prize.

PNOC president Thelmo Cacnio, who is in Austria, said in a statement: "Getting international recognition for our solar project

PNOC, A6

FIRST prize goes to PNOC for its 5-year solar power project which has installed to date 1,647 solar panels in remote households with 13,100 more coming up.

Aussie literacy project lifts lumad kids

By Anthony S. Allads
(50 Mindanao Bureau

DAVAO CITY—Lumads (natives), Moros and other people from educationally disadvantaged groups continue to benefit from an Australian government-funded literacy project being undertaken in Mindanao.

For the past 22 months, these groups have gained access to formal and nonformal education programs under the Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM).

The project was launched in Southern and Central Mindanao and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in partnership with the Department of Education more than a year ago.

Dr. Ian D'Arcy Walsh, BEAM project director, said the first access program, the BEAM-Lumad Integrated Functional Education (BEAM-LIFE), was implemented in four villages in Davao del Sur: Little Baguio and Bonacloc in Malita and North Lamidan and Rabantaas in Don Marcelino. All these villages have no public schools.

But through BEAM-LIFE, 179

ALLADS, A4

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WEATHER FORECAST
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2003
Second FRONTPAGE

Ebdane: Copa, PMAP behind Makati rally

By Christine V. Esguerra

FIRST the Council on Philippine Affairs (Copa) and the People's Movement Against Poverty (PMAP) joined forces in an effort to topple the Macapagal-Arroyo administration?

According to Philippine National Police chief Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., the massive anti-administration rally in Makati City last Wednesday was led by Copa, allied-turned-critic of President Macapagal-Arroyo, backed by a contingent from the PMAP staunch supporters of jailed former President Joseph Estrada.

Although Ebdane did not go so far as to say the two groups had removed their accidental alliance, their move to...

The police chief, however, said, some fleeting stories that Copa was part of a coup attempt to usher in disorder in the group and provoke it from further declaring alleged corruption in the Macapagal administration.

"I don't know where General Ebdane got his information that Copa was at the rally" Layosa told the Inquirer. "But if this is the type of information that he's feeding the President, we wonder if this administration has been committing acts of retaliation."

Copa, he said, would never join forces with the PMAP whose members he group had helped to block during the bloody Lenten Day siege of Malacañang in 2001.

Enemies of state out to undermine polls, warns GMA

By Juliet Labog-Javellana and Luige del Puerto

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday warned that anti-administration forces were again trying to destabilize her government and undermine the presidential election in 2004.

"There is a pattern of renewed destabilization to erode the looming electoral process and I call upon the people to remain free and democracy," the President said in a speech in Cavite, Ifugao, where she gave out land award certificates to Ifugaos San Juan.

She used the occasion to appeal to the people, "especially those who are poor," not to be "easily swayed by misinformation or outright lies by groups seeking to destabilize the government because your government is looking after the dignity of every Filipino."

On Wednesday, police used tear gas and water cannons against some 10,000 protesters in the Makati financial district who were demanding the resignation of the President, Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. and Speaker Jose de Venecia after they refused to disperse when their permit to rally expired.

The President said on Tuesday that the demonstrators, mostly supporters of ex-President Joseph Estrada, were "being misled out of desperation by some politicians and businessmen."

"We shall respect the right of protesters to express their political views and grievances but we would like to draw the line on the side of rivaling lawful conduct and public order," she said yesterday.

And while she has called for reconciliation, she said she also "must stand in the way of anarchy."

"I extend my hand to my detractors but I cannot allow them to flaunt the law," the President said.

She asked leaders of protest actions to police their own ranks and impose discipline among their followers to avoid violent clashes with authorities.

She said the police and the military were standing by for the "maximum tolerance" policy with demonstrators "but they are ready to enforce the full might of the law when required by any situation."

The organizers of the Wednesday protest action yesterday accused the President for staging another that the poor had been egged on by "desperados political leaders" to join the rally.

"We are not robots or members," said lawyer Estelita Cendoza, spokesperson of the Oct. 30 Movement which organized the rally, in a phone interview.

"If Gloria thinks the poor can't think for themselves, she is wrong. People went to Ayala not because they are pro-Estrada or anti-Davide or anti-Gloria. They went there because they are fed up with their miserable conditions, which GMA hasn't done anything to improve," she said.

US remains wary of JI, says antiterror envoy

By TJ Burgonio

THE UNITED States remains concerned over the ability of the regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah to "renew and reconstitute" in Southeast Asia despite the arrest of its senior leaders, the top US envoy for counterterrorism said yesterday.

J. Cofer Black, the US state department's counterterrorism coordinator, disclosed this yesterday after meeting with National Security Adviser Roilo Golez and representatives of the multi-agency Counterterrorism Task Force to draw up new mechanisms to combat terrorism in the region.

"The United States is concerned about the JI group in the region. It has some history to it. We're particularly concerned about their ability to move and communicate internationally to the region," Black said.

Black, however, said that the "US concern" about the JI doesn't has somewhat been "mitigated" by the increasing cooperation among countries in the region against terror.

"This concern is being mitigated by cooperation as evident in the countries in the region... by the support that the US has been able to give to its friends in the Philippines," he said.

Black also reiterated that the US policy in dealing with the JI and other terror groups is similar the same. "First, to make no concessions to terrorists and to strike no deals; second, to bring terrorists to justice for their crimes; third, to isolate and apply pressure on states that sponsor terrorists and force them to change their behaviors, and fourth, to build capability of their countries."

The US official lauded the Philippines' recent successes in its antiterror campaign that resulted in the arrest of some JI operatives, including bomb-making expert Fathur Rahman al-Ghozi, Agus Dwikarna who was nabbed in March 2002 and Saifih Hitki, who was captured on Oct. 2.

"We are mindful and grateful for the successes and efforts of your government and your law enforcement organization in the counterterrorism fight," Black told reporters. With Christine Esguerra

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Rebels mutilate Zambales man

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—New People's Army rebels in Zambales mutilated the corpse of a man they executed, cutting off his penis and stuffing it in his mouth, the military's Northern Luzon Command said in a statement.

Lt. Col. Ferdie Abaya, Nolcom public information officer, identified the victim as Julio Romero of Barangay Bulingcamping, San Felipe, Zambales, reportedly an ambu-ambusan activist.

Abaya said Romero was seized and killed after 10 p.m. on Wednesday by about 15 rebels led by Cheng de Guzzle, alias Ka Jimmy, of the Bataan-Zambales provincial committee, also known as Elordeta.

"The rebels' executioners were not satisfied with peppering his body with bullets. They even cut off (his) penis and placed it in his mouth," Abaya said.

In the statement, Nolcom chief Lt. Gen. Romeo Jimenez called the act "barbaric."

"Those NPA are the people who call themselves protectors of human rights," Jimenez said. Brigadier General, PIA Central Luzon Unit

ELECTRICITY far beyond the city limits is provided by the PNOC's solar home system to address the needs of poor communities which cannot be serviced by the main power grids.

PNOC bags environment Oscar

From page A1

is one big proof that we are able to provide a very efficient and effective system to address the needs of our country's communities which cannot be serviced by our main power grids."

5-year project

The PNOC's solar home system distribution project is being implemented in coordination with the Department of Energy and Shell Solar Philippines Corp. It is a five-year effort that was started in April 2002 through a 0.350 million euro (P350-million) grant from The Netherlands.

To date, the PNOC has installed 1,607 solar panels in remote households throughout the country. About 100-200 units are set up monthly.

Cooperatives

Aside from the power component, the solar home system package includes one black-and-white television set and radio.

To make the package affordable to rural folk, a community-based credit program was set up to finance the costs through cooperative initiatives.

According to the PNOC, providing households with electricity has many positive effects. The economy is strengthened, air, water and soil pollution are reduced. Literacy and life quality are improved, and better lighting makes reading and working easier. Health problems are reduced as people inhale less smoke from kerosene lamps. And there is better access to information from TV and radio.

The PNOC expects to install 75,100 systems by the fifth year of implementation.

Clean factory

Another Energy Globe award winner was the German energy technology company Solon for its design for a "clean factory" which optimizes the use of solar energy and natural light. It uses no electricity and relies instead on solar heating panels and a heating system that burns vegetable oil.

According to Solon, the extra cost of its technology is recovered within 10 years because of the amount of money saved on conventional heating.

Other winners

Other winners were a hydro-electrical plant built on the river Amoco in Colombia which features environmental prevention schemes and an energy-saving hotel chain in Mauritius.

Of the more than a thousand projects from all over the world that were nominated, India's Ananda Dane Water Save project was the only other nominee from Asia.

Categories

The Energy Globe Awards has five categories.

- Fire—for energy projects that tap renewable resources like sun, water, wind and biomass.
- Earth—for projects involving buildings and construction materials, traffic means, new material extraction and fuel production.
- Water—for projects related to drinking water supply, water consumption, irrigation, water sanitation and shipping.
- Air—for the protection of the atmosphere, reduction of greenhouse gases, efficient combustion and its abuse are quality.
- Youth—for projects, projects, activities and initiatives in the field of environmental education that achieved an increasing environmental awareness.

The projects were evaluated based on sustainability and efficiency, innovativeness of approach, cost and benefit, and potential to be done elsewhere.

Austria's Environment Minister Josef Pröll said the Energy Globe Awards prove that "sound economics and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive." With a report from AFP

Aussie literacy . . .

From page A1

formal pupils have finished early childhood education classes.

The number represents 78 per cent of the total pupils enrolled in the classes. The graduates are now qualified to enter Grade I.

Four Tribal Learning Centers for early childhood education, functional literacy and Grade I classes have also been established.

BRAILLIST also has Functional Literacy Classes from which 100 parents and out-of-school youths have so far graduated.

The graduates have already put up livelihood-enterprise projects.

Welsh said the project provided skills training and startup capital assistance to the learners. They were organized into cooperatives and are now into full production of vegetables, abaca fiber, vinegar and coconut-based food products.

Sultan Kudarat project

Another Australian government project, the BEAM-Providing Educational Access for Cultural Enhancement (BEAM-PRINCE) is being implemented in at least eight barangays in the municipalities of Lebak and Esperanza in Sultan Kudarat.

Welsh said that its major accomplishments were the enrollment of 344 parents and out-of-school youths in Functional Literacy Classes, the establishment of a Cultural Learning Center and mobile learning facility, the development of indigenous learning materials, and the conduct of nutrition interventions activities in priority barangays through a Participatory Installation for Nutrition Rehabilitation Training.

ARMM project

Another success in education project, the BEAM-Expanding Opportunities for Muslim Education (BEAM-HOME), is being implemented in the ARMM.

Through the project, 500 out of Learning Competencies Framework and Teachers manual in the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic studies have been printed and distributed to Arabic teachers.

Arabic language, values

BEAM-HOME has trained 317 Arabic teachers in the use of these modules and teacher guides.

The teaching of Arabic language and Islamic values in public elementary schools in the region has been mandated by the DepEd-ARMM.

Welsh said the success of the BEAM projects has greatly eased the DepEd's task of providing education even to those who have limited to not to schools.

The 5-year project's first phase is about to be completed.

The second phase, which will run until 2009, will soon start. The second phase has a total grant of P900 million spread in four years.

Kangaroos 'waltzing' . . .

From page A1

The guy mannequin broke free from the Finance saucer sources to the Trellises department and are now hounding around sounds bordering a dozen villages in the neighboring frame as your impairments, Le Parisien daily reported.

'Joking Kangaroo'

"The kangaroos' presence in the town didn't happen yesterday. They began making the woods their own after some people who tried to steal their tethered several of them," a park employee told AFP.

Signs signaling their presence have been erected along roads bisecting the southern part of the huge Rambouillet forest.

"Kangaroos have been part of our daily life for 20 years," said Francoise Grangeon, mayor of the town of Emancy.

Even the inspector of the town school is called the 'Joking Kangaroo', Grangeon said.

Our experts said the kangaroos survive on buds and leaves, and reproduce in the month of August. AFP

E-mail us at sports@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Teddyboy S. Molmisa
Assistant Editor Edwin M. Villanueva

Pacquiao win-win plan a secret

By Sabrett L. Lagumbay
Contributor

MANNY Pacquiao, yesterday, let his would-capitalize on Marco Antonio Barrera's weaknesses, yesterday said he has perfected a win-win battle plan.

He, however, kept mum when asked specifics of his fight strategy.

"They are confidential," Pacquiao maintained yesterday on the eve of the official weigh-in for the Clash of the Titans promotion at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas.

The most Pacquiao could say was that his strategy would all depend on what style Barrera brings in the ring tomorrow.

Barrera, in contrast, has informed that, for the Pacquiao fight, he has been working on a lot of head movements and defense techniques.

"Pacquiao is really strong, a very good fighter, very tough" Barrera admitted.

Unlike in other major championship cards, no trash talk is expected in today's weigh-in.

Instead, the two main protagonists will most likely make a pitch for one great fight.

"I am going to pray to God that nobody will get hurt in this excellent night of boxing. I have no predictions, but I promise I will do my best to win this fight," Pacquiao was quoted as saying by Fightnews.

Meanwhile, Dionisia Pacquiao, mother of the 'Mr' superbantam 'boss, wants her son to know that, although she will not be at ringside tomorrow, she'll be at the viewing outpost.

"I know my son Manny will come home very triumphant. My gut feel says so. And I've never been wrong in that department," Dionisia told the Inquirer in an interview last Sunday in Kidapawan City, where she witnessed her other son, Bobby, decision Jaime Barcelona.

Dionisia, who now lives separately with her husband, has intimated that in both of Manny's defeats—to Marco Antonio Barrera in 1996 and Medgoen 3K Battery in 1999—she had felt ill days before the two bouts.

But she swore she has the highest confidence level for her son's clash with Barrera.

"My son is very strong. He's very prepared. Barrera still knows that," confided Dionisia.

Pacquiao, who parades a 37-2-2-1 win-loss draw record with 29 KOs, was at last reckoning a 5-1/2 to 1 underdog.

Barrera boasts of a 57-7 record with 40 KOs, and is universally recognized as the best featherweight in the planet.

Solar Sports will air the fight live this Sunday starting at 11 a.m.

What's Inside

Welcoat shoots for solo lead

WELCOAT Paints, back to its dominant ways, seeks win No. 5 and the solo lead when it battles Viva Mineral Water-FEU today in another doubleheader of the PBL Centennial Cup at the Pasay Sports Complex.

Powered by five members of the ASA Games-bound 'SP team, stirring them James Yap and Kevin Scott, the Paint Masters could have their hands full against a young team that made the biggest impact in the preseason conference by making it all the way to the finals.

Welcoat, proud owner of five titles since its breakout year in 1999, and Montana Pinandayan are currently tied for the lead with similar 2-0 win-loss cards.

Purefoods Chapel Centurion, which ruled the first conference, is logged in the hunters Green-the subset is tied for ICTSI La Salle at 4 p.m.

The Welcoat Boys, built around the core that powered FEU to a title sweep over Ateneo in the UAAP, has suffered back-to-back setbacks, including a 69-70 defeat to Montana last Tuesday but coach Eng Hen Chiu remained unfazed.

"We know how strong Welcoat is, but we have to think positive," said Bansil.

Villaruels to file charges

By Dalila T. Mallari Jr.
With Reporters Lizzie Burton

LEGAZPI CITY—The family of then Interior Air Transportation Office pilot Col. Rodito Villaruel will soon file criminal charges in court against all the members of the assault team and the officials who launched the botched operation that killed Villaruel and his aide, Mary Lt. Luigi Ricardo Cardullo.

"The death of Villaruel was an overkill. Definitely, we will file criminal charges," Lawyer Ed Encarta, counsel for Villaruel family, told the Inquirer in a phone interview.

Encarta, on tips, insisted yesterday that 2/Lt was already surrendering, but they still peppered him with bullets. He was wounded but still alive and yet the assault team still finished him off," Encarta said.

Villaruel and Cardullo were captured down by a police assault team three hours after they took over the air control tower of the Mayor Airport International Airport to protest government corruption.

Quoting the autopsy report, Encarta said one of the fatal bullets that hit Villaruel was fired point-blank or from a distance of less than two feet.

"He was shot in the nape with the shooter standing not close, leaving behind traces of gunpowder in Villaruel's body," he said, stressing that based on the same laboratory report, "the two victims tested negative for powder burns when tested by the police."

No explosive

Encarta said no gun or explosive was recovered from the victims as the scene of the incident.

According to Encarta, he has been demanding the list of the members of the assault team but was always turned down. He said he would ask for a copy of the list from the Senate which is conducting its own investigation into the incident.

In Malacañang, a presidential security adviser yesterday claimed that Villaruel had met with members of Sen. Gregorio Honasan's faction of the Guardians "a week or less" before he seized the Naga control tower.

But Undersecretary Abraham Purugganan, presidential deputy adviser for special concerns and head of the Task Force for the security of critical infrastructures, said Villaruel "worked out" of the meeting for full endorsement.

Disagreement

"He walked out so it means they disagreed. We don't know what the disagreement (was all about)," Purugganan said in a phone interview when asked if the meeting meant that Villaruel's act was not an isolated incident but part of a destabilization plot against the Macapagal administration.

Purugganan said Villaruel's link with Honasan's faction of the Guardians could come up in the ongoing investigation of the Philippine National Police and the "security audit" of the airport tower by his investigators task force.

Purugganan said he expects the report of the team of security experts to be submitted within a week.

He also said the "truth team" is looking at the recently lapsed martial law of Villaruel's rebellion.

With reports from Jerome Aning in Cagayan City, Cecille Suerte Felipe in Davao City, Jeannette Andrade in Naga City, Jaime Laude in Manila, and Volenda Sotelo Fuentes, PDI Sta Rosa Laguna Bureau

Study says private sector cheating gov't of P127-B yearly

By Michael Lim Ubac

PRIVATE corporations, businessmen and professionals cheat the government of P127 billion in taxes annually, according to a first-ever study conducted by the National Tax Research Center (NTRC).

"Corporations, businessmen and professionals have evaded paying P300 million in taxes a day over the past five years, an amount that could have built 25 kilometers of concrete road every day," said Sen. Ralph Recto, chair of the Senate ways and means committee.

The NTRC study, however, was limited to government revenues collected from income taxes and value-added taxes (VAT) from 1998 to 2002, and did account for revenues lost to corporate politicians and bureaucrats.

Recto said the estimated income tax gap from 1998 to 2002 averaged P83.3 billion annually in the case of the value-added tax, the amount of unpaid VAT for the same five-year period averaged P43.6 billion annually.

Combining the income tax gap and uncollected VAT, "this brings to P127 billion the combined amount of VAT and income taxes which escaped the tax net every year from 1998 to 2002," said Recto.

Based on the NTRC computations, the country could have built 10,580 kilometers of road, or five times the length of the Aguri [in Cagayan] to General Santos City highway [in Cotabato] every year from the taxes corporations and businessmen could have paid annually, Recto said.

The NTRC study noted that ordinary workers were more honest taxpayers than millionaires, according to experts, who revealed the statistics of tax cheats based on withholding taxes.

As to the VAT, about 30 percent of the potential VAT was not collected.

"We can interpret the data this way. Juan Ordinario paid 33 centavos for every ten pesos he earned while Joe Millionaire paid only 3.1 centavos. That revelation is indeed the favorite sport of the elite," Recto said.

Budget cuts to hit poor harder in '04

THE GOVERNMENT's plans to cut its spending on economic and social services in next year's budget would adversely affect President Macapagal-Arroyo's program to reduce poverty in the country, a congressional think tank warned the other day.

According to a report prepared by the Congressional Planning and Budget Department, the share of social services in the national budget will shrink to 28.7 percent in 2005 from 33.2 percent in 1999, and the allocation for economic services will decline to 10 percent in 2004 from 20.2 percent this year.

CPBD director-general Rodolfo S. Fuentes blamed the cuts on the government's growing "inevitable" expenditures, "such as debt servicing, which accounts for roughly one-third of next year's budget. This is not going to help the fight against poverty at all, he said.

The CPBD questioned the government's optimistic growth and tax collection forecasts next year, saying these could blow up the budget deficit beyond the targeted P196 billion in 2004.

The think-tank expects economic growth, measured against gross domestic product next year, to hit 4.2 percent, significantly below the government's low-end forecast of 4.9 percent. At the same time, the CPBD said, slower economic growth, higher interest rates and the weak peso should lead to an additional budget shortfall of P4.35 billion. *With reports from Cathelijne Broekhuijsen*

Lucio Tan's ma dies

CHAN SING Sit, the mother of tycoon Lucio Tan, died on Wednesday at the age of 93.

She is survived by her children Lucio, Cecilio, Mariano, Harry, Shirley Tan Chua, Sally Sia Chuang and Felisa Chan.

Her remains lie at Funeraria Paz, Araneta Ave., Quezon City Extension; it can be seen 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Chinese Cemetery.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Saturday, November 15, 2003
32nd Week in Ordinary Time
1st Reading: Phil 3:8-14+20-21; 2 Pet 3:8-9
Gospel: Lk 13:1-9

Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should pray continually and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor people. In the same town was a widow who kept coming to him, saying: 'Grant me my rights against my opponent.' For a time he refused, but finally he thought, 'Even though I neither fear God nor care about people, this widow bothers me so much I will see that she gets justice, lest she will stop coming and wear me out.'"

And Jesus explained, "Listen to what the evil judge says. Will God not do justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night even if he delays in answering them? I tell you, he will speedily do them justice. Yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Commentary

"In the same town was a widow who kept coming to him, saying: 'Defend my rights against my opponent.'" Carlos Cardoso wrote this beautiful poem on persistence:

Nothing in the world
Can take the place of persistence.
Talent will not:
Nothing is more common than
Unsuccessful men with talent.
Genius will not:
Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education will not:
The world is full of educated derelicts.
Persistence and determination
Alone are omnipotent.
The slogan "Press On" has solved
And always will solve
The problems of human race.

(Gerardo Publications Inc., 9 Masaya St., QCVO, Opp. Mikhael, Quezon City, Tel #'s: Bet 4, Philippines, Quezon City, Tel.: 921-2000; Fax: 921-1420; e-mail: dailygod@i.net; Website: http://www.dailygospel.org; Publication No. 1-4-89) (Permission to reprint given by Cardinal Archbishop of the Philippines)

Court gives Imelda 15 days to explain

THE SANDIGANBAYAN has given former first lady Imelda R. Marcos 15 days to explain why she should not be arrested for violating conditions of her bail when she stayed abroad beyond the 90 days allowed her by the anti-graft court.

The Sandiganbayan had granted Marcos one month, from Sept. 28 to Oct. 28, to travel to the US and Europe but it was only on Nov. 12 that she returned to the court to present her passport and sign documents as stipulated in her permit to travel.

The former first lady is facing 22 graft cases before the court which asked her to explain in writing within 15 days from notice why... the court should not order the forfeiture of her bail and re-arrest, locate and secure the immediate issuance of alias warrant for her arrest."

Marcos' lawyer Robert Jimo filed a motion with the Sandiganbayan to extend her trip, but government prosecutors asked that his bail bond be revoked and that she be cited for contempt and jailed for violating conditions of her trip.

Armando M. Nolasco

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WHAT'S the issue? President Macapagal appears to be listening intently to Angono Mayor Jerry Calderon during the outbreaking on Friday of Lukso officials in the Rizal town.

SEN. PANFILO LACSON appeals to President Macapagal to respect the rule of law during the hatching of the Lorenzo Assembly for a Clean, Stable, Orderly Nation at the Pan Pacific Hotel on Roxas Blvd.

Kuratong Baleleng cops appeal: Stop endless persecution

Airline Terrorism Can Come in Many Ways...
It's The One You Can't See
That is the Most Dangerous!
KILLING MOON
A Movie As Real as Today's Headlines!

summary execution case, was a guest at the lunch.

On Wednesday, Quezon City Judge Teresita Tuñao dismissed the case against Lacson and his 33 co-accused on the ground that there was insufficient evidence that the 11 fleeing Baleleng gang members had been summarily executed.

Rule of law

Lacson said the 33 accused police officers charged with the bank robbery gang had died in a shoot-out.

"The rule of law has spoken. We expect nothing less from the government but to respect and uphold the rule of law," said Chief Supt. Francisco Lubiu, pushing Boss a statement.

Col. Gil Meneses said they had all "suffered a lot" in the past eight years and urged government to "allow us [to] lead normal lives as human beings, as our wives, fathers to our children, and police officers and public servants."

At the press conference, Tuñao and Lacson claimed that the Kuratong rub-out case was reviewed by the authorities solely to persecute Lacson and drove him in jail.

"We have been dragged into controversy for so long now and we sincerely hope that with the decision of Judge Tuñao, we will be finally spared from this relentless political harassment," said Tuñao.

Disbarment

Lacson accused the government of harassing Tuñao, citing the threat of disbarment proceedings he has been barred for committing "gross abuse of discretion."

The senator, who is a declared candidate for president in 2004, said he believes President Macapagal-Arroyo was aware of the state prosecutors' disbarment move against Tuñao.

"The President said she will respect the decision but do we see any respect from [Chief Prosecutor Jovencito] Zuño and company for they are now even meeting for the disbarment of a judge who just rendered a decision not to their own liking, is that respect for the decision or the rule of law?" he asked.

Lacson claimed to be the target of government prosecution and that the 33 police officers had been unnecessarily dragged into the issue.

Many names

In a related development, a lawyers' group yesterday asked Tuñao to name the people who allegedly pressured her to issue arrest warrants against Lacson and the 33 accused in the Kuratong Baleleng case.

In a letter to Tuñao, the Equal Justice for All Movement (E-Just) said Tuñao should disclose the identity of the people allegedly pressuring her as failure to do so would give the "impression that you tolerate such crimes and could put the whole judicial system under a cloud of doubt."

Gov't pressure

Tuñao said on Tuesday that the Malacañang's [illegible] administration had put pressure on her to issue the warrants. She said she was even offered a seat in the Court of Appeals.

She however did not name the administration officials who supposedly lent her.

E-Just spokesperson Leonard Oliveros said the judge should name names because the crimes were involved: direct bribery under Article 210 of the Revised Penal Code and obstruction of justice.

Support with evidence

If Tuñao refuses to reveal the names of the people who illegally tried to pressure and influence her decision, the E-Just would go to the Supreme Court to compel her to do so "in the interests of justice."

"Should your charges be supported by convincing evidence, the perpetrators should be prosecuted. On the other hand, if you fail to perform this duty, your accusation will be regarded with doubt and opprobrium," De Vera told Tuñao.

'Flusting'

Zuño declined to comment that he and the other accused officers still to anoint service had been in "flusting arrest" since the Kuratong Baleleng case first surfaced. For the past eight years, they had been reporting for administrative duties, he said.

He said the Philippine National Police was treating them differently, citing how they are made to sign in every morning but it when reporting for work.

Appeal

Zuño said he hinted if was nothing from the service in May 2004. But he said he was appealing to the PNP to let the younger police officers return to their normal duties.

The other police officers who attended the news conference were SPO2 Dionisio Carino, SPO4 Wilfredo Nuno, SPO4 Orvin Marshal, SPO4 Philip Pasagui, SPO2 Roberto Aglipay, Chief Insp. Gavar Tanagan, SPO4 Antonio Filat, PO3 Rolando Lalagan and PO3 Leroy Umanay.

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Family of 7 butchered in Zamboanga del Norte

death in what Mrs. Sen. Vilfredo Salazar, commander of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, described as a "very gruesome" killing.

Salazar said the seven victims were probably killed on Wednesday evening.

Motive unknown

The military initially blamed "lawless elements" but later said rebels belonging to the separatist MILF were responsible.

The motive for the attack was not known. MILF leaders could not be reached for comment.

Maj. Roberto Rabanta, the 1st IB spokesperson, said the bodies were only discovered early Thursday morning when villagers noticed an unpleasant smell coming from the Bulos house in Sitio Mamigan. Houses in the remote village are far apart, the military said.

Salazar said that soldiers pursuing the assailants caught up with them in Danuli Macabo village on Thursday and killed one rebel and captured another.

Machetes

Soldiers seized bloodstained machetes believed to have been used in butchering the Bulos family from the date and captured suspects.

Salazar said the slain rebel was Bandong Yusop of the 108th's 3rd unit commander.

Buen Latiban, the captured suspect, said the soldiers that he and his group had killed the Bulos family.

Rabanta said the military believes the perpetrators of what they now call the second Kuknok massacre was probably also the same group which carried out the attack on the town on Feb. 19.

Torched houses

Armed men believed to be MILF rebels had attacked the village of Kuknok Lubo and shot them, killing 14, including an infant and a 7-year-old boy, and injuring 10 people.

Mayor Amold Canlet said the attackers set fire to several houses before fleeing.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Narciso Abaya, who flew headed the Southern Command, said some of the victims had died from the fire.

The MILF has denied responsibility for the February attack. Julie S. Alipala, Dec Mendoza Buenaa

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The WORLD

Edited by Lawrence B. Ibarra

WASTING AWAY

Easter Island's impressive "Moai," giant head statues carved out of volcanic rock, are in danger of being destroyed by years of tropical rain and wind as well as careless humans and farm animals. Experts have called on the international community to commit funds to preserve the monoliths, whose mystery draws tourists to the world's most remote inhabited island 4,000 kilometers off Santiago, Chile. AFP/FILE

US deaths in Iraq exceed toll in first 3 years in Vietnam

PHILADELPHIA—The US death toll in Iraq has surpassed the number of American soldiers killed during the first three years of the Vietnam War, the brutal Cold War conflict that cast a shadow over US affairs for more than a generation.

A bruising analysis of US defense department statistics showed on Thursday that the Vietnam War, which the Army says officially began on Dec. 11, 1961, produced a combined 382 fatal casualties from 1961 through 1964, when there were only hybrids on hallucinogens used at just over 17,000.

By comparison, a roadside bomb attack that killed a soldier in Baghdad on Wednesday brought to 397 the tally of Americans dead in Iraq, where US forces number about 130,000 troops—the same number stationed in Vietnam by October 1965.

The casualty count for Iraq apparently surpassed the Vietnam figure last Sunday, when a US soldier killed in a rocket-propelled grenade attack south of Baghdad became the conflict's 383rd American casualty since Operation Iraqi Freedom began on March 20.

Largely still in the numbers of deaths in combat from the broader US war on terrorism, which has produced 488 military deaths in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Southwest Asia and other locations.

Statistics from battle zones outside Iraq show that 91 soldiers have died since Oct. 7, 2001, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, which US President George W. Bush launched against Afghanistan's former Taliban regime after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington killed 3,000 people.

The Bush administration has rejected comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam, which traumatized America into a protracted upheaval and prevention of military body bags and television footage of grim wartime cruelty.

Recent opinion polls show public support for the president eroding as he heads toward the 2004 election, partly because of public concern over the deadly cycle of guerrilla attacks and suicide bombings in Iraq.

On Thursday, heavy gunfire and explosions echoed across Baghdad as US troops pounded rebel positions for a second night, and administration officials sought ways to accelerate a transfer of power to the Iraqi people.

Because US involvement in Vietnam increased gradually after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, there is little consensus on when the first big American wars began.

Some date the war to the late 1950s. Others say it began on Aug. 5, 1964, when Lyndon Johnson announced air strikes against North Vietnam in retaliation for a reported torpedo attack on a US destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Moreover, the Iraqi's did not date for the Vietnam War has been set by its Center of Military History as Jan. 1-1, 1961, when two Army support companies consisting of 32 aircraft and 400 soldiers arrived in the country, an army public affairs specialist said. Reuters

5,000 Saddam loyalists fighting coalition in Iraq, says US general

TIKRIT, Iraq—About 5,000 "diehard" loyalists of ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein are fighting the US-led occupation forces here, but they soon be overcome, the general in charge of US forces in Tikrit said Thursday.

Gen. John Abizaid, head of the Central Command which runs operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, said the fighters loyalists are well-armed, well-financed and have "a brutal and determined" leadership.

Abizaid's comments came at the command headquarters in Tikrit. "The close and secure regime enemy to us at the present time are the former regime loyalists."

Abizaid said followers of the former ruling Baathist party operate mainly around Baghdad and the northern cities of Mosul, Tikrit, Hawija and Baiji. Their main weapons are "improvised explosive devices," mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and sometimes small arms.

The general went on: "I would say that the hard core of people actively armed and operating against us does not exceed 5,000.

"Now, people will say '5000, that's a very small number.' But when you understand that they're organized in cellular structure, that they have a brutal and determined ruler, that they know how to operate covertly, they have assets to a lot of money and a lot of ammunition, you'll understand how dangerous they are."

The Baathists "do not represent the greatest threat to peace and stability, and it is very important for us to deal with that reality, to discover their infrastructure, to neutralize and kill or remove that threat" to the country's emerging government.

"Clearly we must attack and destroy the enemy where we find them. And on the military front, we have to be very, very mindful that the vast majority of the Iraqi population is thankful to have us here, for better there."

Abizaid said there are currently about 130,000 US troops in Iraq, in addition to 25,000 from Britain and other countries.

And he expressed confidence that the Saddam loyalists would be beaten.

"There is no military threat in Iraq that can deter us out. We have the best equipped, best trained army in the world in positions the toughest areas that we have ever had with. The troops are confident. They're tough. They're capable."

The coalition is seeking to quickly train an Iraqi security force to boost US hopes of a speedy withdrawal from the country it started on March 20, bringing down Saddam less than a month later. AFP

QIONAMI Courtney, son of the 10 Kabara killed in a suicide truck-bombing attack at the PEDU base in Mosul, Iraq, Mar. 12, on his wedding day with Ricardo Sabina.

Norway halts mediation in S. Lanka

COLOMBO — Norway suspended Sri Lanka by suspending its role as a peace broker on Friday, saying it would return to the process only when a power struggle between the island's president and prime minister ended.

Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen called the head a serious threat to the peace process, but added the government and Tamil Tiger rebels had assured him they were committed to the ceasefire now holding in the 20-year war.

"The recent pure brother pressure on President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to end a political crisis has created where the president sacked three cabinet ministers and suspended parliament last week.

"The resumption of peace talks is seriously impeded by the political crisis," Helgesen told reporters.

Helgesen said the talks, which stalled last April, could have resumed "tomorrow" had there been "clarity on who holds political authority and responsibility on behalf of the government to ensure continuation of the ceasefire agreement and resumption of peace negotiations."

Until such clarity is reestablished, there is no space for further efforts by the Norwegian government to assist the parties," he said.

"We will go home and wait... We have no intention of abandoning the peace process, but there are limits to what we can do," Helgesen said.

The fighting in the war that has killed 64,000 has been on hold since Norway brokered a truce in February 2002, but Helgesen said the political crisis could put it under strain.

"We need to make clear that the ceasefire will be much more difficult to sustain in a political vacuum," Helgesen said.

He said the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, which oversees the ceasefire and includes officials from Norway and other Scandinavian countries, would continue.

"There is no change in SLMM activities. We are here to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire," said spokesperson Agnes Hagedal, adding that there were no reports of armed or mass violations in the north and east since the crisis began.

Norway's move comes a day after the exclusive leader of the Tamil Tiger rebels said the power struggle made it impossible to sit down and talk peace, but Velupillai Prabhakaran added that he had no plan to return to war.

Kumaratunga's office said she was studying the news, while there was no immediate comment from Wickremesinghe.

Both met Helgesen separately on Thursday after he held talks with Prabhakaran in the northern rebel-held town of Kilinochchi.

"What a mess," one Western diplomat said.

The Colombo Stock Exchange followed a percent on the news.

Kumaratunga said she had fired the ministers in the interests of national security, saying Wickremesinghe had made too many concessions to win peace.

He responded by demanding she take over the peace process herself or relinquish the defense, interior and media ministries.

They have met once since their latest row erupted, agreeing only to meet again next week.

A previous peace bid by International ended in renewed fighting in 1995, and the current effort began with Norway's help.

Freethrow dud Ellis pulls down Gin Kings

Tigers even q'final series

By Jove Nisperos

RUPERT Ellis again fanned his anemic average from the free throw line to pull down Ginebra in the ongoing Samsung-PBA Fatafat Cooler-event at the Cuneta Astrodome last night.

Confirming his tag as the worst freethrow shooter in the series, Ellis missed all but two of his 10 foul shots, including six straight in the third period, as Barangay Ginebra fell 77-68 to Coca-Cola in Game 2 of the quarterfinal series.

The win tied Coca-Cola at 1-1 heading into Game 3 on Wednesday with the winner advancing to a best-of-five semifinal series against the winner of the duel Bull Ells-Welcoat quarter final clash.

"It's not about the game plan of the coach. It's all about the effort, energy, commitment and the desire to win the game," said Coca-Cola coach Chot Reyes.

Ellis also played below his average of 26 points per game, ending with 16. He had 22 rebounds, five assists and three steals.

On the other side of the floor, Tim McCalla (officially ranked by the Tigers as offense) posted his first game-high 20 points in the last seven minutes that took the fight out of the Gin Kings.

Push comes to shove between Ginebra's Jayson Castro and Coca-Cola's Rudy Hatfield in the fourth period of their Samsung-PBA Fatafat Cooler-event game at the Cuneta Astrodome last night. Castro was ejected from the game after the incident. (Photo by Boy Santos)

Coca-Cola 77—McCalla 20, Ellis 16, Caguioa 12, Dimaranan 12, Lingad 8, Wilson 4, Salvador 3, Dario 2, Hubalde 0.

Ginebra 68—Asoro 13, Ilon 10, Cabagnot 10, Hatfield 9, Castro 8, Mamaril 6, Reyes 4, Ildefonso 3, Bonleon 1, Intano 0, Arquiza 0. Not in uniform: Ibanes.

Quarterscores: 15-18, 35-40, 53-60, 68-77.

Ginebra's Jayson Castro slithered the Tigers an overhead a five-point deficit and gave a 68-62 advantage entering the third period.

From there, the Tigers exploited Ellis' poor freethrow shooting while keeping on the aggressiveness of McCalla down the stretch.

Reyes said the fierce rebounding of the Tigers overthrew high hopes that he and his team had for the Gin Kings after the boards took a turn for the worse.

"That's the key to Game 1, we were really outrebounded 45-30," said Reyes.

Ginebra 91—Asoro 23, Ilon 16, Cabagnot 15, Dimaranan 12, Lingad 8, Wilson 4, Salvador 3, Dario 2, Hubalde 0. Not in uniform: Ibanes.

Coca-Cola 77—McCalla 20, Ellis 16, Caguioa 12, Dimaranan 12, Lingad 8, Wilson 4, Salvador 3, Dario 2, Hubalde 0.

Quarterscores: 15-18, 35-40, 53-60, 68-77.

It's a tangle of hands as Paul Pearce (left) and Rudy Hatfield of Coca-Cola battle Mark Caguioa of Ginebra for the rebound. (Photo by Boy Santos)

Letran, SSC start quest to be No. 1

Game 1 today (Rizal Mem)
3 p.m.—University of Manila vs. Arellano
4 p.m.—Letran vs. SSC

THE NCAA rivals Letran and San Sebastian start their quest to be recognized as the country's No. 1 collegiate cage team when they play separate rivals today in the commencement of the Championship League Series 3 in the NCAA gym.

Letran, this year's NCAA titlist, won the equally competitive Intercollegiate Championship Series last year.

The Knights will play the University of Manila contenders at 3 p.m. while the San Sebastian University of Manila contenders at 4 p.m.

Benjo Cortez, CS Recruiting coordinator, became Letran's collector.

Bulging NCAA Most Valuable Player Lordan Regondo, on the other hand, leads the Stags' squads.

The tournament found San Sebastian to hold the remaining home 14 games at the University Gym to make the competing teams feel more at home.

Athletes raring to take off; no funds from Palace yet

By Mary Anthony Reyes

WHILE the 400-plus national athletes are eating to do battle in the Xiamen Southeast Asian Games, the Philippine Sports Commission is fighting and wondering when the P40 million budget would be released by Malacañang.

With just 20 days left before the Games start, PSC officials are pressing hard they were still waiting for the funds for the annual competition.

The funds will be used for the air fare and board expenses of the 400 athletes and 200 coaches, officials and technical staff to Xiamen, the City Work and Thinking.

Philippine Olympic Committee president Cielo Dayrit earlier estimated that it would cost P70,000 to send a delegation member.

Under Dayrit's computation, sending the entire delegation would cost about P40 million.

But PSC chair Eric Buhain, who passed in yesterday's SEAGF ex Commission, said the amount would also include equipment and uniforms of each delegation member.

Buhain also vouched for the participation of the athletes. He said 85 athletes from 17 sports, who have received funds from Pilot Chairman Mike Arroyo's foundation, have wound up training here and abroad and have been identified as winnable in the Games.

NBL PANASONIC CUP

Snipers seek 3rd win in row

TODAY'S GAMES (Jose C. Rizal Coliseum, Cainta)
3 p.m.—Jumpe-Jumpe vs. Alaska for big m—Hongkong vs. Magnolia

MAGNOLIA faces the guns for its third straight win in the 2002 Panasonic National Basketball League Regional Cup tournament today when it faces defending champion Jumpe-Jumpe Hongkong Sportz at the Jose C. Rizal Coliseum in Cainta in San Fernando, Pampanga.

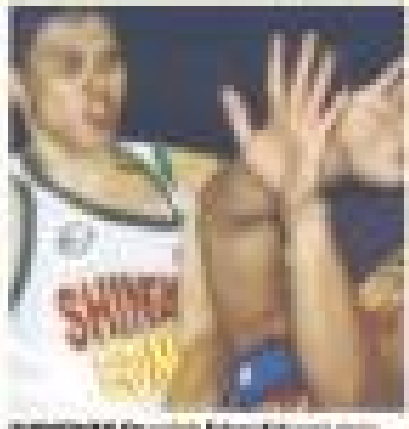
Game time between the Snipers and the Cola-cola express is 3 p.m.

Two more Letran rookies, Rafael Rempoyo and Rodolfo Ylaya, Mon Magnolia—Gaelo while 6 p.m. starters.

Coached by Mario Quinsaat, the Snipers proved to be an early contender, posting down Spring Cooking Oil Ilan Mido and Chaokoy Adhesive to date that was unique in character, was sponsored by Rebisco, RJ Bee Logistics, Adjustaform, Mellow and Pilsbury's Spring.

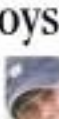
The Angeles Bulls will parade a new lineup led by reigning MVP Dave Ildefonso, Wilfredo Leong Jr., Marlon Tadeo, Eleonoro Cerda, Gerwin Bondi, Jamil Mondejar and Alvin Pua.

"I think we'd be able to put up a good game against Magnolia," said new coach Lawrence Chongson.



SHOOTING—Olympia's Edgar Silvano runs into Spring Sun Rabbit's Rudy Hamar in a recent game in Cubao. Olympia won, 91-85.

Super-hot Pagunsan destroys opposition


PAGUNSAN: 5 down

BACOLOD—A good game thrown neither course nor weather.

That's how Pagunsan found in his satisfaction as he destroyed the opposition in the small but elite championship race with a 3-under par 69 yesterday to win the sixth leg of the Metrobank Amateur Tour at the well-kept Camp John Hay course here.

His margin of victory: a whopping 11 shots.

A day after coming close to the course record with a 63, the 23-year-old Pagunsan remained hot with five birdies in the last eight holes. He finished with a 36-hole total of 127.

Dave Hernandez carded a 71 for 141, the same card of Jay Bayron whom he topped for second place on a countback.

Pagunsan, Dave joined his national teammates Jerome Enlaterra, Omar Lopez, Elmer Talvanar and Jil Tanpiseo to the National Grand Finals set next year March at Mt. Malarayat in Batangas.

Dalmacio topped the Forest Hills leg, Lopez ruled in Davao, Talvanar prevailed in Cagayan de Oro and Tanpiseo won in Boracay.

The Gamenang Tour is co-sponsored by Manle's Restaurant, Wilson, Gatorade, Tokyo Tokyo, Mizuno, Custom Clubmakers, Bagtin E and Bunlop Golf with radio stations Hilot-dot, Chrisline 98.3, Yakee 99.1, Magic 89.9, 99.5 RT and 103.1 K-Lite as media partners.

Zarate 4 shots off new leader

SHANGHAI—Overnight co-leader Danny Zarate of the Philippines salvaged a 1-under-par 71 in Masters conditions Friday to drop to a share of eighth place, four shots off the lead halfway through the $500,000 Volvo China Open.

Zarate, who shared the first-round lead with compatriot Angelo Que and China's Zhang Lianwei after a 67, needed 136, four strokes off new leader Choi Kyung-moo of South Korea and Adam Fraser of Australia.

Que fired a 73 to be in a five-way tie at 140.

Choi shot a course-record equaling 8-under-par 64 to power into a tie for the halfway lead with Fraser.

The 43-year-old Choi, who had a two-day total of 128, rolled in eight birdies against no bogeys at the Shanghai Silport Golf Club.

Fraser finished two of his last three holes for a 67.

Zhang settled for a 68 to tie one stroke off the pace with Scotland's Russ Cuin, who produced a bogey-free 65.

Defending champion David Gleeson of Australia carded a 69 to share fifth place with Thailand's Thaworn Wiratchant and Scott Strange of Australia in the Asian PGA Tour event.

AFP

MILO LITTLE OLYMPICS

6,000 students vie for 477 golds

OVER 6,000 high school and elementary athletes gun for the 477 gold medals at stake when the 2005 Milo Little Olympics National Capital Region assemble today at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex.

A total of 481 other silver and 167 bronze medals are also up for grabs in the 11 sports events—athletics, badminton, chess, football, gymnastics, swimming, squash, tennis, basketball and volleyball—to be disputed in the games.

POC president Cojuangco, Mons. Manila Development Authority chair Sayoni Fernando and Manila Sports Council (Mascot) chair Ali Atienza have been invited to the 9 a.m. opening ceremony at the Rizal Memorial track oval.

Among the special guests in the annex Olympics organized by the CTW Group and supported by Cebu Pacific, SCAA Executive Committee, the Philippine Sports Commission, Department of Education and the Philippine Olympic Committee are sports luminaries of Milo, headed by Hi Soo Ong.

Lucky breaks propel Carapiet to kart title

CALOOCAN, Cavite—*Edge sports* team Carapiet, aided by a pair of lucky breaks, powered his way to two podium finishes to clinch the ST Light title of the 2005 Shell Karting Super Series last Sunday at the Batangas Racing Circuit here.

The 16-year-old Carapiet, second behind leader Blake Sy of Team Cebu CDG in the overall standings, benefited from Go's absence on the starting grid and then needed all his skills to outshine his rivals in the races.

Carapiet figured in a collision in the qualifying heat and started last in the race-one final.

Starting 15 points or at least a fourth place finish in the last two races to clinch the title, Carapiet seemed up third in the first race of the two-leg grand-slam Blake Angeles for the clutch-and-flag in the second race of the event sponsored by Pilipinas Shell, Swiftgroup, Subic, Inc. to end Saturday's karting.

Go missed the races to pursue a scholarship in London.

Sharing the limelight with Carapiet were 9-year-old Paco Rodriguez of Team Cebu CDG who bagged the Cadet 10 crown and Archie Nobis who ruled the Invicta division.

Benitez sizzles in Pasig Open all-events

BEING Benitez of Cebu no-indeed her fiery form against a non-student case that includes two members of the world champion trio in the 23rd Pasig Bowling Association Trophy Tournament at the Greenhills Valley Country Club.

Benitez, herself a member of the RP team that bagged the silver in the 2002 Asian Games women's title, scorched the lanes for 2,346 pinfalls, way ahead of PBAPI's Joel Rosario (2,033) and Lito Clarin (2,004) in the Class D all-comers of this championships sponsored by Sen. Robert Barbers, Rep. Chuck Medina III and Mayor Vico Sotto.

Benitez's scores of 1788 and 558 are also those in the meet's division with 2,398, just one pin ahead of PBAPI Chester King. Third was King's teammate, Matthew Ee, with 1,931.

Joan Benitez of TRISH-PH-ers earned the lead in Class E with 2,509 pinfalls, while Thelma Arbo Bettoni set the pace in ladies' Class B with 1,828.

Lucena teamed up with Alvin Grand for 1,808 and the lead in men's Class O doubles, while Dada Dagupan's Terry Barangan and Henry Lok carried 1,243 to pace Class B.

In the team event, Atoms Catchalian, Lok and Barangan led Class A with 1,891.

Pioneer Badminton serves up Christmas tournament

THE 2004/05 BSC season of the Epson Cup badminton tournament has motivated to pursue interests to draw up an equally competitive event designed to increase the sport's following in Metro Manila.

Pioneer Badminton, the Mandaluyong City venue of the just-concluded Epson Cup, will again play host to continuous open month's debut in the Pioneer Badminton Christmas tournament on Dec. 13-14.

And just like the Epson Cup, the Christmas tournament is expected to have hundreds of shuttlecock action in the qualifying series set Nov. 27 and 28.

The tournament, backed by Pacific Internet and Magic 89.9 MTM, is open to Pioneer Badminton habitues and non-regulars, according to organizing committee head Bea Alonzo.

Alonzo said at least 50 of the 200 tournament slots would be reserved for non-Pioneer members, interested parties may call Alonzo at 0917-811-2281.

"We initially thought about making the tournament strictly for members only. But the mounting response of participants during the Epson Cup moved us to open the event to non-Pioneer members," said Alonzo.

More than 800 badminton fanatics trooped to Pioneer Badminton during the Epson Cup, forcing organizers to trim the number of competitors down to a manageable level.

Pioneer Badminton admin Tarhata, the brains behind the Epson Cup and the Pioneer Christmas tourney, said the new, wider open court will be used to limit the number of participants to keep the level of competition at its peak.

"We expect a similar response as far as the number of participants is concerned," said Tarhata.

Jose Navarro

Mavs down Rockets; Wolves devour Bulls

CHICAGO Bulls guard Jamal Crawford is attended to by medical personnel during the Chicago-Minnesota game. Crawford landed on his head after colliding Minnesota's Fred Hoiberg.

Bryant appears before trial judge for 1st time

EAGLE, Colorado—Kobe Bryant made his first court appearance Thursday before the judge who will handle his sexual assault trial, saying nothing as the parents of his accuser sat just a few feet away.

It was the first time family members of the 19-year-old woman have attended a hearing in the case and the first time they have seen the Los Angeles Lakers guard in person, prosecution spokeswoman Krista Flannigan said.

Besides the parents, two brothers and a cousin of the woman were present. The family left the courthouse without commenting, though Flannigan said they told her they were glad they came.

Bryant, who played a home game in Los Angeles the night before, sat calmly through the 11-minute procedural hearing, occasionally whispering to one of his attorneys. He left immediately afterward but Lakers officials said they'd seen her kept him from arriving in time for practice. AP

DALLAS—Dirk Nowitzki poured in 25 points as the Dallas Mavericks beat the Houston Rockets, 97-86, on Thursday, handling their cross-state rivals just their second loss of the season.

Antoine Walker was next best for Dallas with 17 points, he also collected 12 rebounds while dishing out seven assists.

Steve Nash added 16 points.

The Mavs were despite going just 3-of-19 from three-point territory.

Timberwolves 92, Bulls 89 (OT)

In Chicago, Latrell Sprewell's 27 points paced the Minnesota Timberwolves to a 92-89 overtime win over the Bulls, who are now 1-5 at home.

Sprewell, who also grabbed eight rebounds, hit from three-point range in the waning seconds to force extra time.

Kevin Garnett added 19 points and 17 boards for Minnesota.

The Bulls, who got 21 points from Jalen Rose, lost Jamal Crawford in the late stages when he fell on his head.

He was removed on a stretcher after spending several minutes on the floor.

Blazers extend Checks contract

The Indianapolis Portland Trail Blazers will have a steadying presence for another year.

The Trail Blazers signed coach Maurice Cheeks to a one-year contract extension through the 2005-06 season, the National Basketball Association team announced before Thursday night's game against Sacramento.

A Solar Sports will telecast the Houston Rockets-Phoenix Suns game today "live" at 9:30 a.m., with a replay at 8 p.m. SPIN

BASKETED Wallace of the Trailblazers dunks against the Sacramento Kings.

Germany leads World Cup

WOODMAN

EDMAR BEANO, South Carolina—Germany's Alex Cejka and Marcel Siem combined to shoot a 2-under 67 in windy conditions Thursday to take a one-stroke lead after the first round of the World Cup.

Stales' Jim Thomsons and Bradley Dredge opened with a 68 in the best-ball round, while the United States' Jim Furyk and Justin Leonard were tied for seventh after a 71 on The Ocean Course.

The two-man course will play an alternate shot round Friday in the World Golf Championships event. After another best-ball round Saturday, play will end Sunday with a second alternate-shot round.

Cejka and Siem had six birdies and a bogey on the 7,296-yard Pete Dye-designed layout. The Germans bogeyed No. 17—with Cejka's par putt clanking out—and salvaged par on the 18th after Siem drove into the rough.

"It really was very tough for us, especially 17 and 18," Cejka said. "But I think it was tougher during the round into the wind for me. "I wouldn't say there is a hole where you can rest. Every shot you have to give 100 percent, otherwise you miss it on the wrong side and have to scramble at all."

Siem, 33, is ranked 206th in the world.

"It was a tough start today," Siem said. "I was really nervous at the first tee. It was the biggest tournament I ever teed off."

Sheenan said the course is more difficult now than it was in Europe's loss to the United States in the 1991 Ryder Cup.

"They've put in a lot more bunkers; changed the 18th hole," Sheenan said. "When the wind comes up, it's very very demanding. This is another where you want to run the ball in, but you can't do it here because of the grass. It just stops short of the green." AP

Kane leads Mobile tilt; Delasin 2 off

MOBILE, Alabama—Comedy's Lorie Kane overcame an opening bogey, gusty winds and cool temperatures Thursday to post a 2-under-par 70, good enough for a one-stroke lead over Australia's Karrie Webb in the Mobile LPGA Tournament of Champions.

Only one of the 29 players in the $1.3 million event broke par on a day when the second-placed Webb's club selection. It was so bad that South Korean star Se Ri Pak opened her quest for a "three-peat" with a 75.

"It was one of those days where you'd just hit a shot and try to control the ball flight as much as you can," said Kane. "The only good thing was it was out of the left or right and down or to." The only bad thing that happened to Kane was her bogey at the par-4 fifth hole, where she drove into a fairway bunker and eventually missed a 25-foot par putt.

"Starting with a bogey was not what I'd planned, but I tried to regroup that it was not going to ruin my day," she said. "I worked hard and had some chances." Kane's first birdie came at the par-5 fourth hole, where she hit a 7-wood to the back fringe and chipped to two feet. In fact, all three of her birdies were from two feet—at the par-4 seventh and par-5 16th.

Helped by the wind, Kane was able to work around the rest of The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail at Magnolia Grove with a series of pars.

Ko Pei-Wei, Hur of South Korea, and Dorothy Delasin were the only players to shoot par. Catriona Matthew of Scotland was another stroke back after posting a 73, a shot better than Wendy Ward. SPIN

Wie to play in Sony golf

WIE

HONOLULU—Michelle Wie accepted a sponsor's exemption to play in the Sony Open in January, putting her in position to become the youngest woman to play in a PGA Tour event.

"It's a dream to play in the Sony Open," the 14-year-old Wie said Thursday. "I just hope I can play good and show what I can do."

Gov. Linda Lingle said she requested that tournament officials allow Wie to play in her hometown event, the PGA Tour's first full-field tournament of the year.

Wie failed in two previous attempts to qualify for the tournament. She shot a 71 last year in Monday qualifying, and had an 84 in 2000.

Wie has played in nine professional tournaments this year. AP

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ISSN 0115-2542 VOL. XXVI, NO. 247
OPINION

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Hot air

EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo's call for a "total reconciliation" with opponents across the entire political spectrum crashed even before it could take off. It came dived not because it had substance but because it was propelled by hot air. As soon as the call was broadcast, it triggered a request of rejections. The President's political adversaries had never been as united in an effort to shun her gimmick, even though they had different reasons for doing so.

The call was not well thought out. It was made immediately after the impasse over the impeachment complaint against Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. was broken, giving the administration a breathing spell from the scorching tensions fueled by the stand-off. The President seemed to have been overcome by the euphoria generated by the fact that the resolution of the conflict—so thanks to her but thanks mainly to the courage of the Supreme Court in asserting its constitutional duty—halted the dangerous slide toward political anarchy. The resolution merely bought time for her; it did not put her in a position of strength to buy peace with her opponents through an empty initiative.

She offered the olive branch to a wide range of adversaries who have been pairing her administration under siege. The targets of this new policy of attraction found out quickly that there was no basis for reconciliation.

On the same day that the call was issued, a spate of defiance erupted from Malacañang, where government security forces and mobs identified with deposed President Joseph Estrada, clashed. The objects of the initiative—including Estrada, Eduardo M. Cojuangco, the Marcoses, the New People's Army guerrillas, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Abu Sayyaf and the coup plotters and even the legal opposition—did not find a single straw to clutch for a dialogue on reconciliation.

The President's call was so ambiguous—it did not spell out the basis for reconciliation, with any of these groups—that it thoroughly deserved the researding rebuff. Estrada, for example, demanded in effect that the President surrender her claim to the presidency. The Marcoses had their own demand: they wanted the dismantling of all the apparatus of government, including the Presidential Commission on Good Governance that has been pursuing the the recovery of the Marcos loot.

After her extended shopping expedition overseas, Imelda Marcos has lost incentive or reasonable with the President, since reconciliation (under Imelda's terms) means yanking off the criminal and civil cases over their ill-gotten wealth, and giving the Marcos family a clearance to spend their loot without sharing any part of it with the Filipino people.

In the case of Cojuangco, there is as much—or as little—basis for a reconciliation with him as there is with Estrada and the Marcoses. Cojuangco, through his cohorts in the Nationalist People's Coalition in Congress, surely succeeded in hijacking its alliance with Lakas, in his offensive against the Supreme Court.

Each of these groups has separate demands, all of them impossible to meet unless Ms Macapagal wants to give up the presidency to them.

The point of all these contradictions is that the presidency is not beleaguered by the demands and claims for the satisfaction of the interests of these lobby groups, that it is virtually being held captive by them. From the range of issues that divide the President and these groups, there is absolutely no basis for a negotiated reconciliation. What these groups are in effect demanding is the unconditional surrender of the President, while what she is seeking is no more than a truce from the relentless guerrilla attacks on her administration.

Her tormentors perceive the offer of reconciliation as a sign of weakness after her administration was severely wounded by the conflict over the Davide impeachment. This is the reason why the call provoked them into putting out impossible demands.

Talk about a "strong republic." What we see instead are only strong warlords. Talk of reconciliation will be an empty dialogue between implacable foes.

Adoring aliens

SEPARATE OPINION

Bagumbayan A. Cruz

WHILE the nation teetered on the brink of a constitutional crisis over the impeachment case, President Macapagal-Arroyo took time off from her serious duties to attend an official welcome to the star of a Chinese TV show that had been named the ladies crowd, the prominent members of her Cabinet and other faceless people.

At the luncheon reported the other Friday, Vilma stepped in Malacañang for nearly three hours yesterday as Cabinet officials and Palace employees and their children plus orphans, convicts, victims, journalists and other star-struck fans turned upon glow party. But, one of the people who attended "Meteor Garden," a television show was rather unimpressed. So, try "Bewitched," by Bino Aday Lubag-Awellana couldn't have put it better.

"Pandemonium broke loose in the hallowed Malacañang Ceremonial Hall," she continued, when the Chinese star appeared from the theatre curtain after his grandstar call on the President. Speaker Jose de Venecia's wife gushed on the vestral with Vicky Reyes, the hairdresser, to personally greet the actor. "I like his film, pho," she said of the actor, who was obviously overwhelmed by the comely welcome of his fans. Notably, those included even the usually welcome-minded Secretary Ignacio Bunye, whose name was not heard in vain.

The commotion caused by the crowd of admirers became uncontrollable, causing the actor to seek refuge in the male dining hall with Ms Gloria, who must have been displeased over being upstaged by the young foreigner. The fans wanted his autograph, and here, in part with him, not her. She got little attention from even the three hundred people who were putting with the youngest fans to shake the hands of the Chinese actor.

This (unlikely) happened (just in terms the point) in Malacañang, the palace of the people and the official residence of the President of the Philippines. The orgy of adoration by

teenagers and adults alike was not for a deserving citizen or a distinguished foreigner but for a young television star of a what is now locally known as a phenomena. It would have been unfathomable if it had happened in the premises of ABS-CBN as sponsors of "Meteor Garden." With no less than our chief executive as unofficial backer, the Republic became an unwitting promoter of the no-so-star.

What's with the Filipino people? Why are we so enamored of foreign actors as if they were hallmarks of some exclusive planet with distinctive attractions devoid of ordinary mortals like us?

Our ladylorn regard for Hollywood stars has become practically a way of life with many of us. Except for the level-headed, everybody wanted to look like Marilyn Monroe or John Wayne, to be ogled over by Nicole Kidman and Brad Pitt. There was much excitement when Elizabeth Taylor came for a visit and Naomi Campbell, another jaunt, was swooned by the mop-top hair instances fawned upon her.

And do you remember the phenomenon of Thalia, the beautiful actress from Mexico who captivated the television audience some years ago? She had a steaming face and figure like many of her colleagues in the foreign entertainment world, and many of her Filipino admirers embraced her vicariously as another conquistress from the Caucasian race.

But now we have Yao, an Oriental like us, who is mesmerizing many of our people as if he were also from an unattainable realm

where only beautiful people from the American and Europe dwell in splendor. They are there to enthrall with their distant charms the gaping hearts of sexual and charmless of many from the provincial continent of Asia.

What must have possessed Ms Macapagal, with all the serious problems whirling around her, to receive the Chinese non-entity in Malacañang? Many of our people have various groups and places to out sorority are anxious to discuss their problems with the President and ask for her assistance in ordering them. But the doors of the Palace have not opened for them as they graciously did for the star-dazzled alien guest.

Our people have more claim to her personal attention than a foreign entertainer whose only accomplishment is to exploit the vulgar tastes of the helpless crowd. By making a big production of Yao's country call on her, President Macapagal was probably hoping that some of the lad's appeal would brush off on her and make her more acceptable to the unthinking fans who regard our blood entertainers as the saviors of the nation.

It's bad enough that television shows like Sex Scots and basketball roughnecks like Robert Jaworski have been allowed to debase the brains, and hermanda Noe K., the King of Philippine Movies, has been made Manila ruling with his studio-before machetes and not much else, at least they are Filipinos to debase us; may offer our affection erroneously, even dutifully. It's not so bad to be beguiled by our own countrymen as to be mindlessly enchanted by unseen foreigners.

The exaggerated welcome extended by Malacañang to Jerry Yan betrays once again our ethic gawking admiration of the alien. Instead of giving the Chinese actor her dining reception, President Macapagal should have exhibited a more judicious sense of values by lifting the national pride and dispirtment of the self-respecting Filipino.

How fair and impartial is Yadao?

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

THE SPEED with which Judge Maria Theresa de la Turre Yadao disposed of the Hermosa Habeas case was breathtaking. Under ordinary circumstances she should be congratulated for it—justice delayed being justice denied, and all that. Except that there is now a question of whether what she disposed was justice, or whether it constituted "grave abuse of discretion amounting to excess or lack of jurisdiction."

My lawyer friends tell me that dismissing a case for lack of probable cause, as Yadao has done in a "rare," and "exceptional" occurrence. Another lawyer obliges probable cause for the issuance of a warrant of arrest. Both are defined as "such facts and circumstances which would lead a reasonably discreet and prudent man to believe that an offense has been committed by the person sought to be arrested." Still another explains that showing probable cause requires the "lowest quantum of evidence," and that the general rule that judges apply in these cases is that when there is a doubt as to who is telling the truth, a trial is the way to go.

Which must mean that Yadao thought that the evidence presented by the prosecution (if, that was how finds the already-self-evidently required, or that there is no doubt in her mind as to who was telling the truth, or there was no point in trying the case. It is not only the speed of her decision that was breathtaking, but the quality of her reasoning as well.

Yadao is dismissed the Hermosa case—refusing to issue a warrant of arrest against Sen. Panfilo Lacson and his men for lack of probable cause—most who more that she thought that the reasoning which led these brutal commissioners, one of which was chained by these Sen. Raul Roco, was curiously flawed, because they had recommended that murder or homicide charges be filed against Lacson, et al.

Eleven persons were killed while in the custody of Lacson and his men. Civil and ofensive studies showed they were tied or handcuffed. No gunshot burns on them. All shots fired into the van they were in, were fired out. And no crime was committed? It was enforced rather than a robust? Lacson et al. had nothing whatsoever to do with it, were if it was a shootout? Was that what Yadao concluded with that discretion?

Fairness and impartiality or grave abuse of discretion? That still has to be decided.

What I would like to do, though, is compare Judge Yadao's behavior in this case with how she has behaved in the Valerio case, which is still in her sala. There is one thing in common between the Hermosa and Lacson cases, other than that they both involve human crimes. And that is Raphael Pottos, of Estrada impeachment fame. Pottos was, and maybe still is, a private prosecutor in the Valerio case, and he is also a defense lawyer in the Lacson case. So that there are differences as well.

I have never met Judge Yadao. But I had a personal experience with her in the Valerio case. Bilin Valerio, a guidance counselor at the University of the Philippines, with a Ph. D. in Education, is accused, together with her supposedly-to-be boss, of the murder, on March 13, 2000, of her husband Jun. The latter was the government corporate counsel, which was why the case was widely publicized.

I got interested in the cases because I thought that Bilin, whom I had not met at the time, was getting a raw deal. Reading the prosecution's documents convinced me that this was trained on, and I took up her cause.

That's when I ran afraid of Judge Yadao. She took offense at my column of Sept. 22, 2003, where I complained about the delays in the granting of bail to Bilin. She complained (in a letter sent to and published by the Inquirer on Oct. 1, 2003) that I had "insinuated that it is the court which is causing the delay" and that I "would like the public to believe that Valerio is innocent."

I admit to both. But she also accused me of not doing my homework: "If I missed, I had only looked at the records...." And that charge I can physically deny.

One difference between the Valerio and Lacson cases is that in the former, there was no open hearing to determine probable cause. The judge at the time (not Yadao), following convention, accepted the recommendation of the prosecutor in the preliminary investigation, that there was probable cause, and issued a warrant of arrest. In the Lacson case, Yadao conducted open hearings, which in itself is supposed to be exceptional.

Another notable difference is that it took almost nine months from March 8, 2000 to July 26, 2001) and nine full hours, four-and-one-half hour hearings, before she finally granted bail to Bilin. In her letter to the newspaper, she stated that the prosecution must be allowed "to present all the evidence it may want to produce," during bail hearings. Never mind that that contradicts the statute, because it might allow the prosecution to control the timing of the bail decision.

But one cannot help but ask: Were the exhaustive hearings in the Valerio application for bail an accommodation to the private prosecutor, just as the deliberate haste in dismissing the Lacson case was a bending over backward for the defense counsel?

I said at the time that due process for the prosecution should never outweigh the right to due process of the accused—for now, the door may be on the other foot, with due process for the accused outweighing due process of the Philippines in the Lacson case.

The third difference is that Bilin languished in jail for two-and-a-half years.

Judge Yadao doesn't feel her letter that she was fair and impartial. Do you agree?

Congress left court employees out

IN THE POST session, the popular theory is that the Democratic Senate's Coalition launched the impeachment move against Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. for their own political reasons—to blunt those of the President that, to further the agenda of its Kuwaiti industrialist friend Eduardo Cojuangco. It's pooh-bah believed even by vast and jaundiced Manila that the grand design of the anti-Davide group was to oust him and replace him with Senate Court-packing cronies of Cojuangco. A cynic will find to be found in purely impeachment and this cause in the form of Davide's ponencia in the Senate employees' demand for billions to restore additional allowances. It was an agenda looking for a reason to exist.

But the complaint was, as anti-impeachment Rep. Teodoro Casiño (Bayan, party-list) described it, "viewed in its charges and wrong to law" Moreover, the real culprit was Congress itself, because it passed a well-intentioned but ill-timed law (RA 9347) that increased the allowances of Supreme Court employees by 500 percent. It did not give the Court the authority to grant the increase in special allowances to justices and judges. This is to be derived over a base monthly salary of P30,000 from the Judiciary Development Fund (JDF)—which was created in 1980 by PD 1949. But the new law left only unspecified "surplus" funds to the funds and the employees, which not strictly qualified them.

The Court, through Davide, ruled that Sen. Francis Pangilinan, was well-intentioned or it aimed to almost more lawyers through better salaries and allowances to fill up many vacancies in courts around the country, especially in the provinces. Pangilinan says that there are now more than 300 vacancies. Pangilinan says that while there was a 4.6 percent vacancy in lower courts and a 20 percent nationwide vacancy rate at the time of the signing of the law, records figures show that the number of applicants for judges has dramatically increased

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cuenco

from June to August 2002. In the Eastern Samar regional trial court, for instance, applications jumped more than 300 percent. Agusan del Sur's 11th circuit Misamis Occidental's 600 percent. Bataan City, 1,000 percent; and in Muntinlupa, Iriga, 40 percent.

Unfortunately this renaissance of the law with the court employees under Republic Act 9347 and the JDF, which was created primarily for the benefit of employees receiving the lowest salaries, had been hi-jacked upon its enactment by three houses. Another bill authored by Sen. Joker Arroyo would restore the powers originally given to the court employees who are receiving the smallest salaries the biggest allowances. Davide's bill should help quell their strike. But definitely as we saw in the past three weeks, the Senate may not be willing to have Davide or Justice Davide must essentially be perhaps one of the most reform-oriented Supreme Court chiefs, especially on the matter of employees' rights of receiving allowances and judicious spending of the JDF.

A lot has to be done to set the country on the right track again, but at this point it's difficult to say whether this can be done readily, considering that the core of the NPC in the House of Representatives is working for the interests of Cojuangco. Manila Rep. Rany Amapilig aptly described the NPC group as having remained "united to the end" despite all the pressures from their colleagues and constituents for them to withdraw their signatures from the impeachment complaint. In fact, the minority vote of 77 on the decision of Speaker Jose de Venecia to fully support the Court's ruling is almost the same as the minimum number needed to block impeach, which is 79 votes. The NPC has hidden an enviable unity and discipline that puts the bigger Lakas to shame.

As an aside, it's interesting to point out that the more than 80 signatories to the impeachment complaint were subjected to tremendous pressures from their constituents, various NGOs, religious groups, etc., to withdraw his initiatives. Cebu Rep. Nerissa Soon-Ruiz was said to have come to relent in withdrawing her signature after she was subjected to days of the most intensive pressure from their overwhelmingly pro-Davide fellow Cebuanos so that to the end Ruiz stuck to the NPC group. Many lawmakers made themselves scarce in their home provinces and districts. Manila Rep. Lito Atienza,

Needed: real-life 'Panday'

MANY Filipinos, especially truth-hungry politicians, are pushing for Fernando Poe Jr.'s presidential candidacy in the 2004 elections. They argue that he is very popular with the masses and he is not the owner of any controversy.

The best argument for FPJ's not running for the presidency is precisely this absence of controversy. His failure and inability to take a clear moral stand on the many issues that our country faced in the past and in the present, clearly show the lack of moral courage and his failure to appreciate the tremendous impact of these issues on the life of our people especially the poor. Where was FPJ in the struggles against the evils of martial law? Where was FPJ during the coddest rendezvous to gun down (without Aquino and other human rights victims? Where FPJ (plunder) in the thousands upon thousands of lives during the 1986 People Power Revolt, where was FPJ?

The answer to all these questions is always? Fernando Poe Jr. is Mr. Nowhere Man. He was silent and absent in all these historic events. Why? What he has invested in the freedom, dignity progress and sovereignty of our people? Was his friendship with the Marcoses and his riches greater than his love for our country? The real sin of FPJ against the Filipino people is not the sin of omission. His sin is his active service to evil men who fought against the aspirations of the poor in the real, material sense.

One of the moral problems of our country is corruption—so widespread and well entrenched that a combination of system revolution, leadership by example and political will is needed. The most President of our country should have the moral courage and the resolution to go after the culture of corruption. Can we rely on FPJ to do better than Cory Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the fight against corruption? His silence on the massive and systematic corruption of the martial law government and his campaigning for Cory presidential bid and his loyalty to Erap even today do not speak well of FPJ's ability to mark out priorities.

We have a saying: "Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are." Who are the friends of FPJ urging him to run for the presidency? Martin Sheen? FPJ as their avatar from the crimes they have committed against our people. But can FPJ save our country from corruption, terrorism, poverty and usage?

As a movie fan of FPJ, I love FPJ. But I will never vote for him even for the post of barangay captain. Our country is too country should be more careful than ever to vote for those like Aquino. What our country needs is a real hero who can drop the dragon of poverty and corruption, not an imaginary Panday who can only drop imaginary and evil men in the world of make-believe.

—RAUL E. SALGADO, JR.,
professor, Philosophy Department, Miriam College, Quezon City

Interpreting the Constitution

I LIKE Neal Cruz's column a lot and I often agree with his take on many issues. Cruz's analyses are well-written, making him even more convincing. But allow me to disagree with Cruz on his column titled, "Unrelated article in Supreme Court hearing."

I'm a law student and it is basic in statutory construction that, in case of confusion, one who seeks to interpret a legal provision must ascertain the intent of the lawmakers or, in the case of the Constitution, its framers. I need not elaborate here that certain words have varying definitions or interpretations. I bet my last pair of socks (Cruz's own Nelson's New World Dictionary has a list of synonyms ready for certain words. This fundamental principle in statutory construction, therefore, makes sense.

It is very clear from the transcript of the Constitutional Commission that it actually meant "filing" when it used "service." The intent is very clear and the reason for it is adequately explained by the commissioners. Why risk confusion by our honorable congressmen—one of them a bar topnotcher—is beyond me.

So how then can we prevent a congressman from filing a frivolous complaint? Simple. Mr. Cruz: Congress need only to impose penalties for empty complaints, instead of giving a different meaning to the word "initiate." Had they done this, we would not have this so-called unsolved crisis.

The House has no business to impose its own interpretation of the Constitution. It is its bane to prevent another Rep. Prospero Pichay from filing empty impeachment complaints, a inadvertently forget to insist inter—to make laws, not to impose them.

—LARRY MC TELERO,
G/F Polaris bldg., A.S. Fortuna St., Mandaue City

DENR not defied or mocked

ALLOW me to clarify the news item "DENR order defied: Fires make mockery of suspension of logging in Aurora" (PDI, 10/22/03) by Tonette Orejas.

The story stated that Sophia Lambot was given a prison sentence not more than 600 days from the log pond which the company has given to the suspension of its harvesting agreement on Aug. 1, 2003.

It is, therefore, very clear that there was no defiance, much less a mockery of the environment department's suspension order since the subject logs were cut before the suspension order was issued. Furthermore, there were no new cuttings in the company's harvested Forestry Management Agreement (Sima) area.

I appreciate the initiative of Batarch, an Aurora-based NGO led by Amy Inciong, for its vigilance in the illegal logging drive. Environment Secretary Elisea Gozun has directed DENR regional executive directors to involve local communities and NGOs in monitoring the inventory and shipment of logs in their respective areas. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources encourages the cooperation of members of duly registered NGOs in special DENR offices subject to DENR regulations.

Thank you for giving attention to our clarification.

—ROLANDO L. ARTUZ,
undersecretary for management and technical services, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Visayas Avenue, Diliman, QC

Kyoto protocol today, Stockholm convention next

THE OTHER week, the Philippines became the 100th country to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, a global treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly carbon monoxide—since the agreement was negotiated in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997.

We welcome and laud this ratification of the Kyoto protocol by the Senate as a concrete country participation in the war against global warming.

As part of a large network of non-governmental organizations pushing for its ratification over since the country became a signatory to the treaty way back in 1998, we reserve Senate ratification as a commitment by the Philippines to a higher level of consciousness to discharge our global responsibilities of the Earth and as protectors of our own local environment.

The dangers of global warming have been identified and scientifically established. It must be given equal concern as much as clear water and clean air.

In the 1980s, global warming was related with rainwater burning of fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal. In 1990, the inter-governmental panel on climate change noted that the 1990s was the warmest decade and 1998 was the warmest year.

The country played an active role in the finalizing of the protocol when the Philippine position, which I presented as chair of the Philippine delegation to Kyoto in 1997 and the country's representative in the negotiations on behalf of the Senate committee on environment, was fully adopted as part of the input of the Asia Pacific group of countries.

But because the country is not considered a major source of carbon dioxide emissions unlike the developed countries, the Philippines can contribute to the implementation of the treaty by seriously considering its unexploited prospects and thus out of fossil fuels.

It is especially in this regard hence will serve as a "carbon sink" that will recycle the massive concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Likewise, upon adoption as a law, we will be able to take advantage of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), an international treaty I signed as environment secretary on behalf of the Philippines in Sweden on May 23, 2001.

The Stockholm Convention calls for the global phaseout of 12 highly toxic POPs, chemical substances that persist in the environment, bio-accumulate through the food web, and pose a risk of causing adverse effects to human and human health and the environment.

—LEONARDO J. ALVAREZ,
former secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 11 EP Enrile Road (upper St., Tuntun, Manila

Forest management steps clarified

THIS is in response to the article published in the inquirer's decree the Nation section dated Oct. 20, 2003, "Barely surviving in their ancestral land" by Aquiles E. Zonio. The article focused on the plight of the Unding Bukid Multipurpose Cooperative (UBMPC) of Tampakan, South Cotabato, where Antilok of a Certificate of Stewardship Contract (CADC-CBFM) with an affidavit resource use permit (RUP).

Please allow us to clarify a few critical information to put in context our overall approach on CBFM implementation and our efforts to support the livelihood of upland farmers, more specifically indigenous peoples who are occupiers of our DENRs.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources under my administration, indeed is issued a suspension order dated Jan. 31, 2003 on all 100% as a result of unilateral reports on abuses committed particularly on harvesting of naturally growing timber. However, such a measure was misused so as to use as penalize communities but to misdirected step shown by unscrupulous individuals and persons out to abuse the permit. I immediately ordered a nationwide investigation and was shut on which to base my subsequent actions. Records would show that lifting orders were subsequently issued with appropriate safety nets and emphasizing the principle of sustainability and responsibility.

Moreover, a report of the Ombudsman at Investment Team—created through Regional Special Order No. 2003-053 dated June 9, 2003—showed that the UBMPC is legally vested to operate its responsibility to preserve the entire forest area within its CADC-CBFM against illegal logging, loggers and other unauthorized extraction of forest products even in areas with elevation of more than 1,000 meters tal. An investigation report indicated forestry can issue during the conduct of field investigations and continuous cutting of naturally growing trees even after the suspension. A certification likewise from the local Philippine National Police of Tampakan municipality stated issued with illegal lumber of more or less 2,000 board feet seized by a member was impounded for investigation.

While we fully support any DENR guidance, we caution against violations of the agreements especially if our own people commit them.

—ELISEA GOZUN, secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Visayas Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City

ECC disability claim kicked around

I WAS employed by the Central Azucarera de Tarlac as a belt conveyor operator as in refined sugar manufacturer. In the course of my employment on March 6, 1995, I suffered a lumbar spine injury immediately thereafter, I was granted 120 days' Temporary Total Disability. Afterwards the Social Security System granted the 30 months' permanent total disability benefit under PD 626, as amended, up to January 1999.

On request for additional benefits (disability) the SSS declined/disapproved my claim three times, Jan. 28, 1999, Feb. 26, 1999 and March 23, 1999.

Early last September 2003, I filed an appeal with the Employees Compensation Commission to review my claim. Unfortunately however, the ECC reminded my claim under SSS duly dated (Sept. 22, 2003). Napakasakit po ang pagtanggi ng ECC sa mga claimants na katulad ko. Isang batch po namin ay 23 lumang buto na binalik ang aming mga EC claims sa SSS to finally determine the compensability of our claims under PD 626, as amended. There seems a big disappointment in SSS ang aking claim pagkatapos ibalik ng SSS ang claim. Isa sa judicial remedial or plain denying ng/to us the part of the ECC. Since 1975 thousands of claimants like me all over the country had suffered the same lot.

How can President Macapagal-Arroyo realize a strong republic if bureaucrats like people at the ECC keep SSS-clothing on claims of employees who were disabled or died in the service?

The remanding of claim cases to the Social Security Commission for implementing PD 626, as amended, from January 1999 were no *de novo* decision *dahil sa aking* disability.

I now call on the ECC to resolve my case immediately. *Hindi ako hihinto* ang aking claim. Inaaapi pa rin ako ang dating ang decision in citing binding precedent.

—MARCELO A. VILLANUEVA,
tawagan lamar, Malipayo, San Miguel, Tarlac

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The letters of writers to the editor are requested to include their complete address and telephone or paper number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The Inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

4 dead as 'Weng' hits land

PERSON persons, including two kids, were electrocuted as heavy rains spawned by tropical storm "Weng."

The Office of Civil Defense identified those killed as Lek-lek Budino and Leonisa Jones, both 11 and residents of Daet, Camarines Norte; Emilio Ocubillo, 56, of San Felipe, Naga City; and Jerome Ramos, 32, of Dumlao, Tabaco City.

Tropical storm Weng toppled power lines and cut power off in many parts of the Visayas and Southern Luzon as thousands of ship passengers were stranded in various ports.

Northern Samar and Eastern Samar lost power Thursday night. Power went back in Borongan, Eastern Samar yesterday.

Thousands of passengers bound for Metro Manila were still at the port of Allen, Northern Samar, while the Coast Guard stopped small inter-island vessels from going out to sea.

Classes in all levels were suspended in Cagbi, Allen, and in northern areas of Bantayan and Bohol in Western Visayas; Cebu City and province in Central Visayas; and in Tacloban City and other areas in Eastern Visayas.

All flights to and from Naga City in Cagbi, Kalibo and Catarlan in Aklan were also cancelled.

Storm signal No. 3 was hoisted over Aklan, Cagbi, northern Iloilo and northern Antique in the Visayas; southern Masbate, Romblon, and eastern Mindoro, Oriza Island and northern Palawan including Calauit Island in Southern Luzon.

Weng entered vehicle of up to 100 kph.

Storm signal No. 1 is over the rest of Masbate including Burias Island, Southern Quezon, Marinduque, Batangas, the rest of Mindoro and the rest of Palawan; northern Cebu including Bantayan Island, Panay, Guimaras and Negros Occidental.

The Coast Guard in Iloilo barred all sea vessels weighing below 1,000 gross tons from sailing. Trips of passenger ferryboats plying the Iloilo-Bacolod and Iloilo-Guimaras routes were canceled.

In Biliran, a landslide was reported in the village of Caraycay, in the town of Naval. No one was reported injured.

In Negros Oriental, two fishermen were rescued Thursday night as waves off Siludao coast. The boat carrying Jessel Dino, 32, and Oscar Dendilo, 28, of Barangay Sibulan, San Jose, Negros Oriental, capsized after it was battered by big waves spawned by Weng.

In Lemery City, all sea vessels were stopped from sailing as the height of Weng.

Christopher Cainsat, Coast Guard commander in Dalahican, Quezon, said there were no reports yet of casualties.

He said vessels dropped anchor at ports nearest them. "No ferry will be allowed to leave port with typhoon Weng still around," said Cainsat.

The Coast Guard also cancelled the scheduled trips of ships. Stranded passengers were in the care of barangay officials.

Weng also cut power to various parts of Quezon province and led to classes being suspended.

The storm caused a multiple vehicle accident on the southbound lane of the South Luzon Expressway in Laguna, bringing traffic to a standstill for hours.

Wilson Reyes, of the Philippine National Construction Co., said the accident took place at the Sta. Rosa exit of the highway and at the Carmona portion. Jing Gabriel, Ayanz Burgos, Rona Amarcillo and Jhunmon Bugallon, PIM Visayas Bureau and Delfin Mallari, Rosa Flores, PDI Central Luzon Bureau

Groups of farmers back NFA exec on GMA program on importation of rice

LEGAZPI CITY—Rice farmers yesterday expressed support for the call of National Food Authority council head Angelito Sarmiento to help stabilize rice prices by extending unconventional programs of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

The farmers' groups National Confederation of Irrigators Associations, Pakisabilog Irrigators and Regional Farmers' Action Council and Philippine Farmers Advisory Board expressed their support for Sarmiento.

The groups said Sarmiento is helping provide additional income for farmers through the rice importation program and stabilize rice prices for the benefit of consumers.

Sarmiento had said he was in favor of the extension of the Farmers as Importers Program and the Farmers as Distributors Program, which Ka Mangagagal implements, to augment farmers' incomes and keep rice prices stable.

"The program benefited farmers, consumers and the entire country. We are glad to learn that Sarmiento would firm on his ground to support the program's continuity," said the farmers in a statement released here.

Earlier the farmers' groups volunteered to put on hold the arrival of 300,000 metric tons of imported rice at the peak of the harvest season during which locally-produced rice flooded the market.

The groups said they did this so as not to hurt the production of domestic rice and unnecessarily affect local farm gate prices.

"They were correct. They have to set aside the remaining quota for the last months of rice harvest," the farmers quoted Sarmiento as saying.

The NFA council had rejected the arrival of 300,000 metric tons of imported rice when the two programs ended in August, resulting in losses to the farmers' groups.

According to NFA administrator Arthur Yap, the country has a national supply of rice good for 58 days.

The farmers' groups, however, criticized Food Montemayor, their trusted representative, for opposing the extension of the two programs, saying Montemayor doesn't speak for all of them.

They expressed hope that Montemayor would have a change of heart after evaluating the positive effects of the Macapagal's two pro-farmer programs.

PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Cebu court employees warn of strike over pay demand

By Suzanne B. Sales and Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Take us seriously or else.

The warning was contained in the one-page manifesto of the rank and file employees of the Municipal Trial Courts in Cities and the Regional Trial Courts in Cebu.

The manifesto underscored the employees' claims for exemption from the Salary Standardization Law and for salary increases.

Should their plea continue to fall on deaf ears, the manifesto said the employees might go on strike.

If the employees in Cebu would take a more forceful action to demonstrate their demand, the manifesto said "the mere will generate into a serious and disturbing chain reaction nationwide."

"We do not want to inspire the kind of general indignation [such action] seems to support and work well with our superiors," according to the manifesto, a copy of which would be sent to Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr.

"In the old and long struggle, we use no promise of being risk-averse to our demands, which eventually placed us in a situation where our patience and ability to bear and endure some overpowering pressures, and such would have to no exception but to strike at some indefinite level," they said.

A clerk of court, however, said the one-page manifesto was not the general sentiment of the rank and file in Cebu.

"Some do not approve it. They are loathing as the wrong way. The matter should be addressed to the lawmakers and not to the Supreme Court," said a lawyer who asked not to be named.

Aside from salary increase, the manifesto also asked the restoration of their benefits, which were previously given by the Supreme Court but were later removed.

These allowances included among others educational, rice, medical, transit pay, clothing and anniversary.

Soriquez says DPWH 'open book'

THE DEPARTMENT of Public Works and Highways is an open book, according to Public Works Secretary Florante Soriquez.

In a statement, Soriquez said his priority had been transparency in the department.

He said the proof of his campaign for transparency is the use of the DPWH web site where bid schedules, results and other purchases could be viewed by the public.

"We make sure that all our projects and other activities are known to the public," said Soriquez in a statement.

Soriquez said it was also he who initiated the Project Information and Monitoring System which he said was an integrated tool that allows the participation of local government units, non-governmental organizations and concerned individuals.

He also activated the Complaints and Action Center through which complaints against DPWH would be entered.

ATP MASTERS

Agassi, Schuettler gain semis

HOUSTON—Andre Agassi claimed an explosive 7-6, 3-6, 6-4 win over David Nalbandian on Thursday, reaching the semifinals of the ATP Masters Cup and moving a step closer to the title he last held 13 years ago.

Agassi, who has not claimed the Masters since his first win in the year-end finale in 1990, will next face Germany's Rainer Schuettler on Saturday in a rematch of the Australian Open final for a chance to play for the season's final prize.

The other semifinal will pit third-seeded Wimbledon champion Hugo Dellacqua against unseeded Andrei Pavel or Argentine Guillermo Coria, who clash on Friday to decide the last berth.

With second place in the Blue Group standings and a spot in the final four of the $1.65-million year-end event riding on the outcome, umpire Raoul on a chilly Arabian court with an enraged Nalbandian accusing tournament officials of favoring Americans with their calls.

After losing a hotly contested first set, Nalbandian then lost two disputed calls and, down 0-30 in the deciding game, Nalbandian engaged in heated exchange with umpire Eric Mollins, heightening the tension in a match already tingling with excitement.

That outburst brought ATP supervisor Mark Dalby onto the court, who tried to calm the fiery Argentine.

Much of Nalbandian's anger was directed at tournament owners and promoter Jim Hollingsworth, who invested $27 million in this event but has come under criticism in some corners for his rampant support of American players from his front row seat behind the baseline. Reuters

AGASSI blows a kiss to the crowd after his victory over Carlos Ferrero. AP

SCHUETTLER of Germany celebrates a point against Nalbandi during the Tennis Masters Cup. Schuettler won, 4-6, 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-3). AP

PCA tennis under way

THIRTEEN matches kick off the P400,000 Philippine Columbian Association (PCA) Open Tennis Championships today at the PCA indoor courts in Pasay City, Metro.

Defending champion and tournament fourth seed Joseph Vivencio faces Lt. Julie van player Tanseck Gobo, while fifth seed and sixty Don PP Davis Cuppet Arbiola Kelbo 2002 US Orange Bowl 14-under campaigner Kyle Dunbar at 2 p.m.

Alex Anais, Gonzalez silver medalist and second seed Johnny Avello goes up against University of Santo Tomas player Ryan Ivanga at noon.

Avello, who will honour the men's team in the Thomas Bonham and Aaron Gerson next month, has won nine straight titles this year.

Other matches set at noon are No. 6 seed 2002 Coca-Cola Open runners-up Rolando Raul Jr. against Rodolfo Tanseo and No. 13 Jose Lapaix against Mario Salina, and Mendoza told coed Avellyn Ulang against Ian Schaffer, crumb Frederick Alegre.

Aim vying for the P60,000 champion's purse are Dan Rosario led by Chung Hee-Seok, who lost to Joseph Ignacio in the 1998 final. Chung Hee-Seok also reached the doubles final with Chung Seung Joo.

Chung Hee-Seok, the No. 3 seed with 765 ATP points, tangles with Miguel Hazzat while second-seeded Oh Seung-Hoon, ranked No. 1439 in the world, plays Gilbert Estrada.

Seventh seed Lee Sung-Hoon takes on Vinson wild card Evangelista Tabora.

Rafter sees 3-0 Australia victory

HOUSTON—Two-time US Open winner Pat Rafter predicted an Australian rout over Australia in the Davis Cup final against Spain later this month if Clayton Hewitt can recover his recent form slump.

Rafter said Hewitt could injure Australia as a 3-0 win, despite his rumble from top of the rankings to number 10 this year.

Hewitt and Mark Philippoussis will represent Australia at the 8-9 tied to Melbourne against Spain's Juan Carlos Ferrero and Carlos Moya.

Rafter said although the Spanish clay court specialists are expected to struggle on the grass surface, they could not be written off.

"The Australians had better not underestimate how good these guys are," he told Fox Sports. "Although it's on grass they'll be very, very competitive ... even though I back Australia to win, three-nil," he said.

Rafter said Hewitt, famous for his on-court intensity and confrontational demeanor, needed to "let himself up even more."

"He's a very humble kid, when you really get to know Lleyton," Rafter told Fox Sports. "He just doesn't have that real acceptance, that air of 'I'm going to do this and there'd in your face' sort of thing.

"He knows his limitations and I guess he didn't back himself like you," Rafter was confident Hewitt would bounce back strongly. AFP

La Salle eyes 2nd win

DE LA SALLE goes for a second straight win today against Far Eastern University in the Philippine Badminton Tournament (PBT) Intercollegiate Cup at the Olympic Badminton Center in Lahug, Quezon City.

Led by national team members Beth Ohmanzi and Michelle Carreon, the Green Archers meet the Tamaraws in the first match at 2 p.m.

Playing in the second match on at 5:30 p.m. are University of the Philippines and University of the East.

De La Salle defeated ITE, 4-1, and University of Santo Tomas thrashed FEU, 4-1, in the opening day of the event offering P50,000 worth of sports equipment to the champion. Second and third places will get P25,000 and P12,500, respectively.

IOC allows transsexual athletes to play in Olympics

LONDON—Athletes who have undergone sex change operations will be eligible to compete in the Olympics for the first time under new rules being finalized by the IOC.

The International Olympic Committee approved a meeting in Sweden last month of medical experts in the field and will announce its policy in the next few weeks.

"We will have no discrimination," IOC medical director Patrick Schamasch told The Associated Press on Thursday. "The IOC will respect human rights."

Details are still being worked out, but Schamasch said transsexual athletes will be eligible for the Olympics once they have passed a certain amount of time after sex change surgery.

"The trend is to have an indefinability period," he said. "Once after certain conditions have been fulfilled, the athlete will be able to compete in his or her new sex."

The exact length of the waiting period hasn't been determined. Schamasch said officials want to make sure that any side effects of hormone therapy have worn off.

Schamasch said he didn't know what has been any potential transsexual athletes in line to compete in next summer's Atlanta Olympics, but noted that several international sports federations have asked the IOC for guidance.

"We need to be proactive," he said. AP

BOOM TOWN

What used to be a rock mountain in Baguio City gave way to hundreds of homes and the development in the country's summer capital over the years.

Blame nat'l law allowing casino, councilor says

By Rod Elumba
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

BAGUIO CITY—A councilor who belonged to the group that opposed the operations of a casino in Camp John Hay said protesters should not blame the city council for the endorsement.

Councilor Federico Mandapat Jr. said Congress should be blamed for the mess because the local government could not pass an ordinance prohibiting gambling since there is a national law that gives operators a gaming franchise or license.

Mandapat, during a dialogue with anti-casino groups on Wednesday, said if a casino would operate in Camp John Hay, it would all boil down to discipline among the people.

Municipal said a 1994 resolution on the 99 road leading to the development of Camp John Hay, which outlawed a "no casino policy," is a "valid, legal and binding contract" between the city government and the Baguio Convention Development Authority.

"But the contract is still subservient to the national law. The national law allows the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. to grant franchises to any existing entrepreneur to operate either sweepstakes, lotto, bingo, casino and the like," Mandapat said.

He said the Supreme Court, in several decisions, ruled that a city or any local government unit could not pass an ordinance or resolution to prevent the implementation of a national law.

Councilor Delfin Bolaoitia proposed that regulations should be enforced since the casino operation starts since the city council could not do much to block a legal franchise.

Bolaoitia assured protesters the casino would be opened only to tourists and members of Camp John Hay.

Councilor Faustino Olowan said the casino would help generate funds for other projects of the city and create jobs.

Councilor Elmer Encarnacion, while sitting as acting mayor, had already approved a permit for the casino on Nov. 7.

On Wednesday, at least 2,500 residents, composed mostly of students and members of different groups, marched through downtown and gathered in front of the City Hall to protest the city council's approval of the casino.

With a report from Frank Cimatu, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

Palace suspends Misamis gov allied with Estrada

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—Malacañang ordered the suspension of Misamis Oriental Gov. Jeminito Calingin were an alleged irregular telephone expansion project that the provincial government undertook in 1999.

The interior department's Northern Mindanao regional office yesterday served the notice for Calingin's 60-day suspension, which was signed by Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo.

In the same order, Malacañang installed Vice Gov. Miguel de Jesus, Calingin's nemesis, as acting governor.

De Jesus took his oath before DILG director Rodolfo Ilustre.

In May, De Jesus filed a complaint before the Office of the Presidents against Calingin for alleged dishonesty and grave negligence in connection with the P15-million telephone expansion project in Gingoog City in 1999.

De Jesus said Calingin approved the purchase of a telephone exchange switch even though the existing switch was capable of upgrade.

"Worse, the equipment they bought were old and refurbished which could only amount to P5M," De Jesus said in his complaint.

The provincial government has paid about P12.5 million for the purchase of another switch.

Calingin has repeatedly denied the charges.

In a recent interview with Ronaldo Radjev here, he dismissed the charges as politically motivated.

Calingin is a supporter of former President Joseph Estrada.

Radjev said De Jesus belong to the same party, the Partisyon Pilipino, headed by Cagayan de Oro Mayor Vicente Emano. *Grace Cantal-Radjev, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Countdown for Justice

WAFILE

Rebs attack dad's house

CAMP BONIFACIO, Magindanao—More rebels fired at the house of a provincial board member in Barangay Poblacion in Shariff Aguak town on Monday evening but missed their targets and his family, the military reported.

Maj. Julieto Iñalo, spokesperson of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said no one was injured in the early evening attack but the house of Board Member Ibra Ishris Uno suffered damages.

Shariff says allegedly belonging to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front under Commander Abdulwahid Tulli Tundok stormed Uno's house around 11 p.m. and opened fire on it.

Edwin Fernandez, PDI Mindanao Bureau

RECONCILIATION OR NOT

PCGG to pursue cases

By Jhunnex Napallacan and Carla Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—The call of President Macapagal for "total reconciliation" will not stop the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) from prosecuting cases involving business tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco and the Marcos family.

PCGG commissioner Ruben Carranza said he talked to PCGG chair Hayden Yuray on Wednesday after the President announced that she wanted to mend fences with the Marcos family, deposed president Joseph Estrada and Cojuangco.

"There said nothing has changed as far as the PCGG is concerned," he added.

Reconciliation

Carranza said in a radio interview in Cebu that reconciliation should not mean an end-around of the cases.

"The must not mean forgetting the cases or giving up on the cases, or not doing anything anymore. Whatever it means, it does not mean that the cases . . . will no longer be pursued," Carranza said.

Carranza said if these people were sincere in accepting reconciliation, then they must first admit their sins, return what they took from the people and issue a public apology.

Compromise

Retired Bishop Teodoro Navarro said Ms Macapagal should not compromise the welfare of the Filipino people and the country in her quest for "total reconciliation" with estgovernment or opposition forces.

The Cebu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCII), however, expressed support for the President's offer, saying the move would provide a good business climate in the country.

INQUIRER Visayas

E-mail: [illegible]@skyinet.net

Edna Ann Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Ebrahim L. Benaidoro

Crocodile park snaps to attention

By Jaime Balawing
Cebu City

LOCATED in one of the component cities of Cebu is a nature park that is home to a rare and endangered species of large amphibious thick-skinned, long-tailed reptiles.

Known for its saltwater crocodiles, Crocodylia is a nature conservation center that serves as a safe abode not only to crocodiles but also to other wildlife and threatened animals.

Crocodylia sits in a one-hectare park in Barangay Binaton, Talisay City, 30 km from Cebu City. It started operations on Jan. 4, 2003.

Private individuals and producers who have dedicated their lives to the protection and conservation of wildlife and endangered species manage the park.

Encouraged to invest in November 2006, the place was a cattle farm for 20 years said Nellie Chu, president of the Crocodylia Foundation, decided to convert it into a crocodile park in honor of the deceased girl, that her sisters received for her birthday years ago.

The girl was Magellan, when the years old, a saltwater crocodile with an unwanted size. It was donated to the foundation first as a gift to Chu's sisters.

When it was eight years old, everybody in the foundation was surprised to discover that it was not male after all. Aside from bones, female crocodiles can lay eggs without copulation.

Romantically, another male crocodile, later named Lapu-Lapu, was donated to the foundation. The park has 20 other big ones.

Today Lapu-Lapu is the second largest saltwater crocodile in the country, measuring 17 feet long and 2.5-3 feet wide. He is about 40 years old, while Magellan died three months ago at age 26.

Fees and donations

The foundation does not generate financial support from the local government. It survives from entrance fees and random donations from schools, corporations and local and foreign organizations supporting wildlife conservation.

Crocodylia opens everyday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Entrance fee for adults is P50 and for children P25. A 30-minute discovery is given for a group of 20 visitors.

Aside from the crocodile and turtle ponds, the park has small animal enclosures, reptile area, aviary, botanical gardens, boating and fishing areas, restaurant, picnic ground, function rooms, butterfly sanctuary, souvenirs and visitor assistance.

Visitors can visit fishing area for P50 and pay P100 for every kilo of tilapia and bangus (milkfish) they catch.

The park now has over 200 species of birds, reptiles and mammals including monitor lizards, bleeding heart pigeons, Filipino birds, hornbills, a pair of spectacled salvator alligators, green iguanas and different species of fish, snakes and threatened birds.

What makes Crocodylia more attractive is the close contact for visitors, according to park manager Rhea Jane Cabardon.

THIS NATIVE Samuco residents of Crocodylia showing themselves up

"We don't just delight the visitors with our animals and the amenities we offer but we also educate them. This is the very important role we perform because we want to impart to them the importance of these animals, how we should treat them. In this way people will have a better understanding and appreciation of the animals, their needs and importance," Cabardon said.

The conservation center has 28 saltwater crocodiles and five freshwater Philippine crocodiles.

The saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) live in the Indo-Pacific areas and are usually found in large rivers and lakes. They can grow as long as 20 feet. They have relatively large heads and heavy bodies with pairs of raised ridges.

Hunters

In Crocodylia, the saltwater crocodiles are confined in concrete pens or pond with a depth of at least one foot and surrounded by a five-foot fence. They are fed at least two dead chickens twice a week.

During feeding time, chickens pens are attached on a pole. A push-unpleasant produces a clicking sound to alert the reptiles of their meal. The crocodiles then emerge from their nest lairs or pond and jump at the pole on the delight of the audience.

At times, Cabardon, a biology graduate, said live chickens or cats were served to reorient the crocodiles of their behavior as hunters. However, visitors, especially children, are encouraged to witness this kind of feeding even as conservation rules, she said.

Mahal and Bhengal, both 10 feet long and offsprings of Lapu-Lapu and Magellan, are known for their friendly gestures. Mahal got her name because she is fond of greeting people by placing a lily on top of her head, while Bhengal goes near the fence and wiggles her tail, Cabardon said.

"They are not at all bad. They are quiet animals, they only harm humans if they are threatened or provoked," she said.

Cabardon said the park has not only gained popularity among Filipinos but also attracted some Caucasians and even foreigners.

The park manager said they could accommodate as many as 300 visitors a day. During peak season from August to March, students on field trips from different schools in Cebu, Bohol and Mindanao flock to the park.

The visitors are not only entertained by the up-close and personal encounters with the crocodiles but with other species as well.

Shy type

Park assistant Ilan Bacarelo said they also have five Philippine crocodiles (*Crocodylus mindorensis*) which are as long as 10 feet and are smaller than the saltwater crocodiles.

These types of crocodiles are endemic in the country and are now considered rare and endangered, she said.

"What makes the Philippine crocodiles different from the others is that they are much smaller and slip. They are not as aggressive compared to the others. In fact, in the Caribbean, the people down can share the river with the crocodiles without being harmed. Here, they are rare and endangered because many kill them out of fear and some hunt them for food," Bacarelo said.

According to Chris Banks, an Australian researcher, the Philippine crocodile is recognized as the most threatened crocodile in the world.

One of his significant findings revealed that the number of adult Philippine crocodiles in the world is less than 100 with remnants found in central and eastern Mindanao based on a 1995 survey.

Two trainees hired the Philippine crocodiles in the country. One is at the Silliman University in Negros Oriental and the other at the Palawan Wildlife and Nature Conservation Center in Puerto Princesa City.

Bacarelo said Crocodylia stopped breeding crocodiles for the past eight years due to limited enclosures and the absence of a hatchery. Only 15 pools are available now.

Stop hitting us, Comelec tells Namfrel

By Marlo Mar-ll

THE COMMISSION on Elections yesterday told the National Movement for Free Elections to stop victimizing the poll body as a pre-condition to approving Namfrel's bid for accreditation.

"Public-bashing is wrong and we should not allow it to conduct its own vote count, blemished from now on has to refrain from assailing the Comelec's efforts and prove that it is there to help us," Comelec chair Benjamin Abalos said.

Abalos disclosed the "party" members yesterday during their debut at the hearing on Thursday the Comelec was already prepared to accredit Namfrel for the vote count.

"But this was before I stumbled into the fact that one of our incumbent detainees was still a member of Namfrel," he said in a press statement.

"Namfrel chair Joe Concepcion has told me that Chiquiar Lagman is no longer with them. Hindi. That statement has allowed me to be more comfortable in dealing with Namfrel once again...Now, however, one cannot blame me for apprehensions that some individuals or groups may sabotage the automation of elections if only to make their predecessor still fulfilling," he said.

Abalos earlier said that Namfrel would not be accredited to do a quick count but changed his mind after President Macapagal-Arroyo issued a statement saying she hoped that the group would be accredited.

Abu is Army chief

MAJ. GEN. Hero L. Abu, the ground commander during the failed Oakwood mutiny in 2003of July 27, is the new Philippine Army chief.

Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, Armed Forces of the Philippines vice chief of staff, said Abu's appointment as the Army's 45th commander.

Abu, erstwhile Army vice commander, takes over from Lt. Gen. Gregorio Camilog who is retiring today.

"His being ground commander during the Oakwood [incident] was an added dimension to his many other accomplishments," Garcia said.

Abu, a member of Class 1972 of the Philippine Military Academy, was one of the officers who received awards from the President for quelling the rebellion. TJ Burgonio

Teodoro gives up NPC leadership in House

TO BEGIN, the notion that the 62-strong Nationalist People's Coalition bloc in the House of Representatives only did the bidding of its founder, businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr., has anyhow flop. Alberto Romulo, it has resigned as head of the NPC congressional delegation.

In a course Thursday evening, the NPC accepted Teodoro's long-standing offer to quit.

"With the supervisor are had in the impeachment, it has become apparent that all the moves by Teodoro are being cogently opposed to moves of Mr. Cojuangco," said NPC spokesperson Rep. Francis Escudero (Sorsogon).

"Just putting the party's interest over and above others," Teodoro said. "I would be for the NPC's greater good that I gave way."

Amoving "the party has a deep bench of leaders," he added.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Alfredo Maranon Jr. (Negros Occidental) has been designated new head of the NPC bloc in the House.

"I am putting the party's interest over and above others," Teodoro said. "I would be for the NPC's greater good that I gave way."

Anyway, "the party has a deep bench of leaders," he added.

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Alfredo Maranon Jr. (Negros Occidental) has been designated new head of the NPC bloc in the House.

Maranon is a senior NPC lawmaker currently serving his third and last term.

The NPC bloc had led the move to impeach Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr., which stirs like fire. Johnny Arroyo had charged was Cojuangco's attempt to cow-bridle the Supreme Court where he has pending cases. Carlito Pablo

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MJ convicted: 2 years in jail, $1.2M in fines

From page A1

was disqualified by the House of Representatives Electoral Tribunal last March, leading the HRET confirmed in June, he is still officially listed in the House rolls as being on "official mission."

He was "voluntarily" extradited to the United States on Dec. 20, after a long legal struggle that involved petitions before the Supreme Court.

On the latter, Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. immediately said his chamber will move to drop the Lewinsky from its rolls.

Household vacant

"We can now move to declare his seat vacant. He has been said, noting that Jimmy's conviction meant that it has now become impossible for him to return to Manila, at least before the 2004 elections, to reclaim his seat in the 6th district of Manila.

"If [Jimmy's seat] will be up for grabs in the 2007 poll's elections," Dr. Abueva said.

But Senate President Franklin Drilon, a lawyer, said that because Jimmy has been detained in Florida for almost a year now, he "may be back before we know it."

Drilon said he considered it certain fully or partially as part of the period that you will serve for your sentence," he told reporters.

Asked whether Jimmy could still run for public office when he returns home, Drilon said he was unsure.

No comment

At a press briefing in Angeles, Rizal, President Macapagal-Arroyo declined to comment on Jimmy's conviction.

"I would just like to say, to say that because the process is not yet over. There is still a period of appeal and it's an American court so I would really rather not make a reaction at this time," the President said.

Malacañang is in Manila's 6th district.

Receives salary, perks

Lit prosecutors had said that Jimmy made about $42,500 in illegal contributions and caused false information to be submitted to the federal Election Commission. US Attorney Carol Lam earlier had said the Filipino-American businessman's contributions to election campaigns.

Jimmy used money from his Westec energy and a closely related company to reimburse employees for illegal donations to President Bill Clinton and other Democrats. He also used Westec to pay for perks that Clinton was caught up in a series of hard-raising scandals.

On TV last night, he admitted that he still receives his salary and the perks of a congressman, such as park barrel funds. "It's congressional privilege," he said. "I'm still a congressman," he said.

De Venecia's inaction

But a political rival of Jimmy's, former Rep. Emilio Mario Aquino, blasted De Venecia for failing to act on the HRET ruling.

Aquino, who occupied Jimmy's seat for three terms, said the was bitter toward De Venecia for not removing Jimmy from the roster.

"Ang [House] Speaker ayaw niya ng [Jimmy's name three weeks ago in session] kino of the ruling but he [Venecia reportedly did not want to act on it.

With finality

"The Speaker said na, 'malatap kaluhan si Mark Jimmy [fighting Jimmy's problematic]." He said he was afraid that Mark might do a Saint Peter, you know, discredit the Speaker. That's why I have some hesitations against the Speaker. He's his mark of a politician," Aquino said.

The Supreme Court has ordered Jimmy to show cause why he should not be "in contempt" for allegedly violating the Supreme Court's temporary restraining order (TRO) against the HRET ruling after De Venecia failed to act on it.

The HRET, composed of three Supreme Court justices and nine congressmen, has denied with finality Jimmy's motions for reconsideration.

On June 3, 2003, the order became final and executory, and was recorded in the book of Entry of Judgments. Copies of the decision were furnished to the Office of the President, the House (through the Speaker), and the Commission on Audit.

Attorney Ray Abraham Mitra said many members of the House were already aware of the decision. "I am quite surprised that [Jimmy] still has the audacity to file a motion for reconsideration," he said.

Mitra also challenged a president's report that he had unduly implied Jimmy was involved in the overpricing of the Subic-Clark railway project. The report said 17 people were accused for offering coupons to be redeemed by Jimmy's voters for cash.

Jimmy gave contributions to Clinton, US Senator Edward Kennedy and Robert Torricelli, US Senator Harry Reid, Democrats in Alabama and Thomas Strickland in Colorado, and US House candidate Jess Beaty in Arkansas from 1994 to 1996. With reports from Cherie Baraquiel-Sta. Julian Aurelio, Philip Sabeniz, AP

Moral lesson

Taking the high road, Jimmy, 56, said he hoped his guilty plea would serve as a moral lesson to others. "I want to tell to all my camera where political corruption is frequently alleged but rarely admitted.

His lawyer in Manila, Ed Espina, issued a statement where's road to part, "If Congressman Jimmy de Venecia Jr. pleads guilty to offenses involving the gift of money for a cause he believes in, and not for taking money as some in the Philippines are accused of."

Espina said Jimmy told him "in no uncertain terms" that he would like "to continue serving the people of Manila, and the entire Filipino people if called upon, after he completes his sentence."

Aside from illegal campaign donations, Jimmy also admitted before the US court to using an Umpqua Bank company to funnel a total $5 million out of the United States.

Jimmy's defense lawyer, David Medina, told the court that Jimmy already has been humiliated by the government as an "international pariah" in connection with Mendell Fuerst's commissioned misconduct by coordinating the tax evasion.

A call for comment to Fuerst's office was not immediately returned.

Net worth

Medina said Jimmy has been falsely called one of the richest men in the world. Jimmy estimated his net worth at $2.3 million before learning that records related to his prosecution were compiled against him for the collapse of one of his companies.

Medina also challenged a prosecutors report that he said falsely implied Jimmy was involved in the overpricing of the Subic-Clark railway project. The report said 17 people were accused for offering coupons to be redeemed by Jimmy voters for cash.

Jimmy gave contributions to Clinton, US Senator Edward Kennedy and Robert Torricelli, US Senator Harry Reid, Democrats in Alabama and Thomas Strickland in Colorado, and US House candidate Jess Beaty in Arkansas from 1994 to 1996. With reports from Cherie Baraquiel-Sta. Julian Aurelio, Philip Sabeniz, AP

Verdict of US judge: Evidence inconsistent

By Lolit B. Salmorin

THE CONFLICTING assessment of the Philippine government's witnesses were enough for US District Court Judge Gregory Presnell to deny the extradition of murder suspect Rod Strunk.

In his 37-page decision, Judge Presnell called the government's evidence "a tangled web of accusations followed by supplementation, and sometimes even further supplementation without regard to consistency of information" which were not enough to link Strunk to the murder of Atty. Nida Blanca.

The evidence submitted by the Philippines concerning Strunk's participation in the murder of Blanca is so inconsistent and conflicting that it provides little assurance of evidence to support the conclusion that Strunk hired Fortunato Philipp Medel to murder Blanca," Judge said in the decision.

Presnell said Strunk's lawyers said that the government's evidence alone was enough to deny Strunk's extradition.

"It is not critical at this point to weigh Strunk's evidence since that submitted by the Philippines when it is considered as a whole is simply a reasonable belief in Strunk's complicity," his decision said.

He later added that what dealt the final blow to the case "that was already on the ground" was the competent and admissible evidence of Strunk's innocence.

But Hollows also said that he is not discounting the possibility that Strunk could still be extradited "should new, competent evidence be submitted."

Gutierrez, Demetriou...

From page A1

Demetriou should share the blame since she had resisted directly with the investigation from the start of the case, according to Gutierrez.

Scapegoat

Demetriou retorted that Gutierrez "should not make me a scapegoat for the DOJ's failure to extradite Strunk. I had nothing to do with the preparation of the extradition application."

"There is a joint undertaking of the Philippine government and the US government pursuant to the RP-US extradition treaty forged between the two countries," Demetriou said.

In a press conference, a visibly agitated Gutierrez said that "The preparation of the documents in support of the request [for extradition] was [done] even with the help of Justice Demetriou as we are surrendering why [she] is saying that the evidences presented was insufficient. She went with our lawyers here in the DOJ."

NBI delay

Demetriou said that it was the DOJ which sought her assistance to obtain certain documents needed during the investigation of the case because of the repeated failure and refusal of the Director of the National Bureau of Investigation Reynaldo Wycoco to submit all the sworn statements and other pieces of evidence in the possession of the NBI.

"She has no right to blame me for her failure because I am not and was not ever a member of the DOJ extradition panel since I am not accredited of the BOC," Demetriou continued.

Why only now?

NBI Undersecretary Nonnatus Rojas said the bureau, through the National Capital Region, had tried previously to get Demetriou to tell them what documents she wanted to see.

"Maybe if she had shown the documents to us earlier, then we could have presented them before the court when the case was still being heard," he told reporters yesterday.

Diaz recalled that when asked to return to Demetriou's scheduled press conference on Monday at Ilustre's presence at the Loyola Memorial Park in Marikina, where she would announce with evidence of the DOJ and the NBI's "negligence."

"Work as why like her, subpoenaed witnesses?" the Ilustre chief asked, pointing out that it is actually the NBI and the DOJ who are actively seeking Strunk's extradition to the Philippines.

Blame US court

NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco said that if Rojas wanted to blame someone for the denial of Strunk's extradition, then she should blame the US court.

Wycoco said the same US court that issued the arrest warrant against Strunk after finding probable cause also denied his extradition in the country.

"Inconsistent, isn't it? It's the Philippine government that is helping Gary," he said.

Drilon dismayed

A dismayed Senate President Franklin Drilon also questioned "the quality of the investigation" since the prosecutors "were relying on witnesses who were not presented, which "did not pass the standard of the US judge."

"There is an obvious reluctance on continuing, which is not a very good technique because both parties can change," Drilon said. "It is a very unfortunate [that] evidence is something that we should be able to rely more on."

Drilon said the DOJ could file for another extradition request but this should be backed with additional evidence.

In a statement, Drilon said the decision of the US court would "put the Philippine justice system to a hard light."

No effect on trial here

Gutierrez said that the US decision would have no effect on the ongoing Ilustre murder trial in the Makati Regional Trial Court. She added that the ruling of the Pasig court should not be doubted just because the California court junked Strunk's extradition.

"We will not allow a [foreign] court to make those comments when the evidence that we have presented to our courts, which found that there is a case against Mr. Strunk," she said.

Gutierrez said the Pasig Regional Trial Court has even found enough evidence to issue an arrest warrant against Strunk.

Basis for extradition bid

"We proved that there is enough evidence so the warrant was issued. It was this warrant that became the basis so that the extradition was filed and when we asked the extradition court for [Strunk's] provisional arrest on the basis of the warrant, Mr. Strunk was ordered arrested. That became there is really basis for his extradition. So the DOJ should not be blamed," Gutierrez said.

But US lawyers were also convinced that the evidence we presented was enough to bring back Mr. Strunk," she said.

She also warned the parties involved in the case not to make irresponsible statements about the evidence in the case since it is still "sub judice."

No communication

Gutierrez said Demetriou was aware of the case since the government submitted to the US extradition court, adding that the said others from the camp of Rose Nieves have not talked to DOJ officials to ask about what really happened.

"There is no communication. We have heard those comments only from the media. Not one of them talked to us about what really happened," Gutierrez said.

Appealable

Gutierrez said DOJ Legal Interbe Anthony Cuba has informed the DOJ that the decision of the California judge could be appealed. She said the government would file a new extradition request.

Gutierrez also said that the DOJ would not be culpable by any of Strunk's legal lawyers for the undertaking he issued before he left for the US in January 2002 to send to his ailing mother. In that undertaking, Strunk had promised to return to the Philippines after 30 days.

She said the DOJ would look if there are "deeds" in the Strunk undertaking to return to the country and if the lawyers were involved.

"I think they should also answer for the undertaking the allowed Strunk to leave. [But for the undertaking,] maybe we would not have gone through all this trouble. Maybe we would not have this statement coming from a foreign court that the evidence is insufficient when we are still presenting and later to the Philippine courts," she said.

NBI Agent Nonnatus Rojas, who had gone to Sacramento, California to present the borrowed evidence on the Ilustre murder case, yesterday said the NBI had been battled in presenting all the evidence that it has gathered. It could be added by With a report from Christine Avendaño

GMA offered to send Erap to US, Satur claims

From page A1

idea he rarely in the country," Secretary Raphaerin Tigbao told the local press in a phone interview.

GMA's call

But Tigbao emphasized that a war not Mr. Macapagal's call to decide whether Estrada will be allowed to go abroad or not.

"It is the court that will decide on the case," Tigbao said.

The President's reconciliation initiative continued yesterday to reap a harvest of skepticism, but Mrs. Macapagal found an unlikely ally in opposition leader Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr.

Pimentel rebuked Senators Alan Arroyo and Edgardo Angara for shooting down the plan. "We must, as a nation, welcome this move," he said Pimentel. "Why, make no basing monitoring progress of Gloria [in] Glorio capable of doing anything good?"

Formidable threat

Ocampo said that Estrada, facing plunder charges before the anti-graft court, remained the most formidable threat to the President, which is why, he said, she was determined to get him out of the way.

"Estrada can still raise thousands of his supporters to block the streets and scare Macapagal still," he said. "Mass so, he could be the key factor in the emergence of a united opposition presidential candidate."

Ocampo also noted the recommendation given to Estrada when he was allowed to stay at the Veterans Memorial Medical Center instead of a regular detention cell and allowed to make personal visits to relatives.

"Clearly President Macapagal, who has broken her many word by reneging on the deal, will do just about anything to prevent Estrada the late and break the people's trust...late to serve her political ambitions," he said.

Estrada is currently detained at Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal.

Ocampo said national reconciliation and unity can only be based on justice and that special treatment for Estrada would not help promote true healing and peace.

Charged atmosphere

Pimentel said the highly charged political atmosphere was "self-understandable."

"With the right attitude, there's no reason why politicians can't reach together despite differences in opinion and principles," Pimentel said. He insisted, who stressed that the plan could be summoned as a "must" from endless political bickering, and could "neutralize the things that we can do positively for the nation before the annual deliberations begins."

Good faith

Asked whether he believed that the President cannot well in proposing the reconciliation plan, he said: "I think we are to credit her with good faith."

However, Pimentel said that at the same time, members of the political opposition should "keep our eyes open for any treachery" on the part of the President and her cons.

Guingona

Vice President Teofisto Guingona Jr. also used the criticism the reconciliation initiative has met.

Guingona said it was unfortunate that the administration's readiness to achieve what it calls "principled reconciliation" with the opposition and groups has been met with little enthusiasm. If not outright distrust and distortion.

"Today the crying and urgent need is not only for national unity and reconciliation but the return of civility among our leaders and a restoration of goodwill and trust," he said.

But the Vice President said such conditions "cannot be demanded and turned on like light switches" but are "developed and strengthened over time."

Business leaders themselves are sharply divided over the plan.

Former Central Bank Governor Jose Cuisia said he was not in favor of the President's move to extend a hand of reconciliation to Estrada, San Miguel Corp. chair Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. and other opposition leaders.

"It will send the wrong message [that] no matter how grave a crime you commit, you can get away with it if you make a lot of trouble for the government," Cuisia said.

Industrialist Raul T. Concepcion and businessmen generally support the reconciliation initiative but not as a special approach to solve specific cases of individuals or groups.

'Highly political'

Concepcion said the President's decision to seek a full term next year has made her a "highly political person." Concepcion suggested that the President instead focus on generalities rather than specifics to avoid being accused of favoritism.

But Federation of Philippine Industries president Jesus Arranza said his group supported the President's bid to reach an accord among all sectors in society. And Employers Confederation of the Philippines chair Donald Dee said his group was supportive of the President's reconciliation efforts. "It is good because we need harmony to ensure progress in our country."

Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce Inc. executive vice president Francis Chua said that it is also a good idea to start a process of reconciliation.

"It is better for the President to consolidate on small people who have big beams than those big people with unspoken threats," he said.

Ateneo de Manila University Professor said the time was right for reconciliation. "He should not mind other politicians who refuse to reciprocate this urgent need," he said.

The militant Bagong Alyansang Makabayan urged incoming Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines president Archbishop Ramon Cardinal Arguelles to withdraw his commitment to help in the next reconciliation progress, because "GMA's intentions are still wrong."

Risky

In Malacañang, the President's deputy spokesperson admitted that the plan was "highly risky" but said the President was undeterred by the opposition and its history that may not be popular.

Communications Secretary Ignacio Bunye said it was repeatedly stressed during the June 11 special Cabinet meeting that the plan was "fraught with great complexities and difficulties."

"It's the meeting there were concerns raised about the challenges of undertaking reconciliation while pursuing justice in the courts and amid a festering election context, among other issues," Bunye said.

"That the enterprise will be highly risky and demanding is confirmed by the President herself," Bunye said said serious to the President's call for reconciliation," Bunye said.

But he said it was a "source of hope and inspiration" that the President and her Cabinet were "one in the conviction that national reconciliation is necessary." With reports from Juliet Javellana, Jerome Aning, Jil Cabacungan, Maryjean Ortiz, Martin Sicoli

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METRO

E-mail to: metro@inquirer.com.ph
Editor Alexander S. Villamor

Mayors ban tinted windows on PUVs

By Pinggoy Ordiz

METRO Manila mayors yesterday approved a resolution banning tinted windows and curtains on public utility vehicles to control the rising robbery incidents on PUVs.

Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Traffic Operations Center Director Angelito Vergel de Dios said PUVs will soon have to comply with the resolution or risk a P500 fine.

He added that apprehended vehicles will also be impounded and the fees on their windows will be scraped.

"Banning obstructions that block the motorists' view from the outside would ensure the safety of passengers on buses, taxi cabs and FX units," Vergel de Dios said.

The resolution is based on a 1978 measure which prohibited the use of tinted glass, blinds, curtains and any device that would obstruct the view of a vehicle's interior.

The new memorandum allowed the tinting of the upper portions of the windshield and rear windows, "provided that such can only be opened one inches to width for heavy and light vehicles, or four inches for buses, exclusive."

XMAS PA'BYTIN

A driver passing itself off as part of a new grand Christmas design catches some lighting up to rail stretches of Makati City, like the ones on J.P. Rizal Avenue, reminding us that the holidays...and the election year—is just around the corner. MARIANNE BERMUDEZ

QC REAL PROPERTY TAX

SB vetoes amnesty

By Tina Santos

GOODBYE tax relief.

Quezon City Mayor Feliciano "Sonny" Belmonte has vetoed a proposed ordinance granting a one-time real property tax amnesty on delinquent payees.

Belmonte told the Inquirer that an amnesty would be unfair to those who religiously pay their real property taxes on time, as well as to those who have entered into a compromise agreement to pay their tax liabilities.

He explained that delinquent taxpayers who would benefit from the proposed ordinance would be given concessions not enjoyed by responsible citizens.

The ordinance, which was introduced by 11 councilors led by 4th district councilor Anna Marmeli Esselmo, aimed to ease the financial burden of people with outstanding tax liabilities.

Had Belmonte not blocked the ordinance, huge taxpayers would have been freed from paying penalties and surcharges.

The mayor disclosed that several real property owners have already entered into agreements to settle their tax liabilities, albeit through installment.

"Delinquent taxpayers would be exempted from paying the penalties and surcharges, how about those who have been installments, those who have already recognized their obligations? I believe that's unfair to them. And besides only a few people would benefit from the amnesty," he said.

Furthermore, he pointed out that past city administrations instituted similar moves but failed to get the desired results.

"Past administrations had a bad experience with tax amnesties," he said.

"Besides," he added, "it has a very measurable effect to tax collection. Worse, collection declined the following year after the ordinance took effect."

Belmonte also noted that the one-time LBR payment relief as to arrest and penalties on delinquent real property taxpayers would run contrary to the basic principle of taxation that it must be equitable.

According to the proponents of the measure, unpaid real property taxes, including penalties, have reached P16.7 billion over the last few years.

The mayor said that he already issued an executive order canceling the auction of properties which was scheduled for next month.

"The councilors were saying that we should be considerate enough not to hold the auction during the Christmas season, as I told them I would consent it, and I did. I think that's easier than to give way to the amnesty ordinance," he said.

What gastroenteritis? It's dengue that is bugging Valenzuela residents

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

THE THREAT of gastroenteritis and cholera hitting northern Metro Manila is of little concern to Valenzuela City, which is more worried about the rising cases of dengue fever.

As of yesterday, reported dengue cases in the city this year reached 626.

The city remains under a month-long, City Council-declared state of calamity over the "dengue outbreak."

Thirteen new cases were recorded in the first week of November, city health officials in Annex Gregorio has told the Inquirer. In October, 74 cases were reported.

However, Gregorio said the spread of the mosquito-borne disease appeared to be slowing down.

According to him, the declaration of a state of calamity has allowed barangay officials to buy fumigation machines to combat the insects.

But Gregorio said their battle against dengue was far from over. "Yesterday, city doctors met with City Mayor Bobbit Carlos to plan their next move.

METRO BRIEFS

Woman goes into labor in jail

A DNA Mandaluyong detention guard left inside the Makati City police detention cell house after she and another pregnant companion were arrested at the Landmark department store for allegedly stealing children's clothes on Thursday. Police rushed Mandaluyong to a nearby clinic after her water bag broke inside the cell at around midnight yesterday. PO3 Nicky Mel Corpuz said detainee-settled in 05 Mandaluyong's husband at the clinic while the woman labored for eight hours. After giving birth to a boy, police took her back to detention. Corpuz said Mandaluyong and Annabel Morales, both in their late 20s, were caught with P1,000 worth of children's underwear and similar items. Landmark officials are today back pity on the women and decided not to file charges, Corpuz said. Mandaluyong and Morales were freed at around 2:30 p.m. Marjorie Ortiz

2 WPD cops sacked

PO2 EMMANUEL Villalon and PO2 Peter Gonzales may no longer flash their badges again after the People's Law Enforcement Board of Manila found them guilty of grave misconduct. Villalon and Gonzales, both attached at the Western Police District Station 10 in Ermita-Malate, have been dismissed from service for wrongfully arresting Jay Ventanares and Milagros Garcia on Feb. 4. The two barangay allegedly dragged Ventanares out of his house in Sampaloc, Manila, pulled their guns at him and forced him to withdraw Garcia's P120 savings passbook. Rubye Bulan and Rafael Villalon and Gonzales have a lot of administrative cases on their names. Tina Santos

Drunk and dead

ALEJANDRO Bonaldo, 30, was stabbed to death by his uncle during a drinking spree in Pasig City Thursday night. Bonaldo of San Isidro Street in Barangay Pembo, died while undergoing treatment at the Rizal Medical Center. police said. Dominic Pablito, who lived with the victim, fled after the stabbing. Police said the two were got into a fight during a drinking bout in front of their house at 10:45 p.m. Virgie Arellano

Lawman under fire

PO1 Bill PM Bisar has been relieved of his post after he was arrested at a drinking joint in Pasay City. Bisar, a Station City Thursday night. Supt. Gene Hamilton Ong of the Central Police District relieved Bisar of a criminal charges against Bisar. Police said Pablito, of Barangay Cluster, also accused Bisar of trying to plant a plastic packet of shabu on the victim. Bisar reportedly told Pablito that he was under surveillance for drug pushing and allegedly took his cell phone. Tina Santos

A dose of their own medicine

A US judge threw out the extradition case against Neil Gamble Strunk, principal suspect in the murder of his wife, Hale Bianca, saying the case against him lacked "probable cause."

But probably the real reason is that the US judge didn't want an American citizen tried by a foreign court. The United States is very protective of its citizens even when they're convicted crimes in other countries.

After all, where did the famous statement come from: "No one be a son of a b***h, but he's still our son of a b***h"

So, the next time a Filipino citizen accused of a crime in the United States seeks refuge here and the US asks for his extradition, we know what to do.

It's not fair that we easily give in to US requests for extradition of persons charged in their courts, while they give us a hard time on our request for extradition of persons charged in our courts.

Hmm, come on, it should be fair for all.

* * *

Imagine, we immediately acceded to the US request to extradite Mamila Sng, Mark Jimenez!

But what is the US doing to our request to have Charlie "Wang" Ang brought back to the country to face charges? "Hot US is dilly-dallying.

Let's give the Americans a dose of their own medicine. That way, they will treat us with respect.

* * *

I remember an anecdote my Old Man told me about Brig. Gen. Vicente Lim in dealing with an arrogant American sergeant before the Pacific War.

Lim, a West Point graduate, was not seduced by the US sergeant who pointed him by even if he was wearing a colonel's insignia. The reason was apparent: the sergeant didn't have much respect for Filipino officers.

Lim called the American sergeant to his office and ordered him to salute his cap with the colonel's insignia on it. The cap was hung on the wall.

After the US sergeant complied with the order, Lim told him that it was not him but his rank that the sergeant should respect.

* * *

It's understandable to grieve over the death of former Air Transportation Office chief Pastilo Villareal.

People who knew Villareal admit he was ATO chief will tell you he was one of the most honest chief of the personnel office.

But treating him like a martyr—for striking the council

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

woman at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport and waving his machinegun against the government—is not only going too far, it's outrageous.

* * *

The senators looking into last Saturday's maulaw want to know why Villareal's face was disfigured and his arm riddled with bullets.

I have a limited knowledge about guns and ammunition, but I learned that a .223 caliber bullet (Armalite or M-16 ammunition) is very destructive. So destructive that when it hits a human body, it tumbles inside, blowing off chunks of flesh.

Obviously, members of the SWAT team were armed with M-16 rifles when they assaulted the control tower.

* * *

Why did Villareal and Catchillar suffer multiple hits?

That can be explained. How many members were there in the SWAT team? Let's put the number at five. Five SWAT men pumping two bullets each on Villareal and Catchillar, would make 10 bullets for each of the two targets.

But let the hour of the moment, those could have been more bullets fired by each member of the SWAT team at Villareal and Catchillar. In the heat of combat, a combatant loses count of bullets he fires. Even his gun. Ask any soldier who's had combat experience.

BUSINESS

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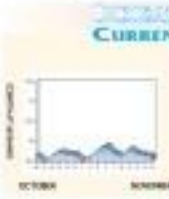
Maynilad seeks court protection vs creditors



By Doris C. Dumlao

THE LOPEZES' Maynilad Water Services Inc. has sought court protection from its creditors after an international arbitrator ordered it to pay more than P6.77 billion in concession fees to the government.

The unit, filed with the Quezon City Regional Trial Court on Nov. 15, seeks to allow Maynilad to avoid liquidation and pursue a rehabilitation plan.

"Maynilad filed a petition for corporate rehabilitation because it now has to face the difficulty of meeting its debts when they fall due as a result of the international arbitration panel's decision," Maynilad's parent firm Hopewell Holdings Corp. said in a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange.

The International Arbitration Court last week ordered Maynilad to pay P6.77 billion in dues to the government and to maintain its 25-year water concession agreement.

Maynilad had notified the government last year it would give up the franchise after failing to win regulatory approval to raise water rates. It alleged that the government failed to comply with the terms of the concession agreement.

After President Macapagal-Arroyo's administration rejected the allegations, Maynilad took the case to arbitration.

The arbitrators also allowed the state regulator, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, to draw on a $120-million performance bond put up by Maynilad when it bid for the franchise.

Bidders guarantee 60 percent of the Maynilad performance bond, while the balance of 40 percent is guaranteed by Hopewell-Maynilad joint venture partner, the Ondeo-Degremont Group of France.

Bidders said Maynilad's recourse to the courts "will enable Maynilad to ensure continuous

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Bunch of rice

ACCORDING to the imported bestseller Mark Twain, who was quoting the imported politician Benjamin Disraeli, there are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics.

In the rice administration of Gloriarroyo, just the other day was forced to talk about something positive, for a change, we were led some impressive statistics.

You may venture me with three straight days of consent of the Three Stooges, who happen to be Cabinet members having a good time, while the country is in trouble.

But I will cast me if these statistics qualify for Mark Twain's bunch of lies.

* * *

FOR three months we were really miserable. The Department of Agriculture said that, in the past quarter, our farm production grew by an astounding 4.32 percent. Bravo!

On their own, the lies, sits, the statistics, would send us those that we are all going to grow fat one of those days. Finally we can produce a lot of food for everybody.

To think, this rice administration accomplished such an astounding growth in the agriculture sector, despite the past quarter's terrible weather.

Actually typhoons damaged a lot of crops. The government statistics did not show it. But I gathered that our corn production, for instance, even posted a slight drop.

It went down in the prices for food grains. They are running up. Food makers are thus looking for alternative, i.e. imported. What else to brew?

We are sure told that we just had a remarkable quarter in agriculture. And as others did all that growth some (how? How?) tell me it was just pure magic!

* * *

If came mainly from rice production, according to a news release which I got from Agriculture Secretary Luis Lorenzo, who was on an official trip to China.

Mr. Lorenzo was quoted in the reports on the statistics on agriculture growth, and yes it turned out he was in China.

Apparently, anyway, he went to China to get more "hybrid" rice seeds, in the form of a panel from the Chinese government.

Hybrid rice is Sin's biggest obsession, because it yields much more rice per hectare than other varieties. It is our only chance to produce all the rice we need.

In China, the hybrid rice program was so successful, that country today has in stock enough rice for more than one billion people for one year. It's a big bunch of rice.

The problem in China is no longer rice shortage. That country went so far that it could be buried in rice. It has such a huge glut that it does not know where to store it.

* * *

ALRIGHT, since rice is the biggest sub-sector in agriculture, a good harvest such as the one we had in the past quarter, can pull up the growth rate for agriculture altogether.

And that was actually the story in the past quarter. All the other sectors, such as poultry, piggery, and fishery suffered a slowdown in growth.

The other sectors still grew, true, but their growth rates were lower than that 4.32 per cent growth rate for the entire agriculture sector.

In other words, we may have rice on the table for Christmas, but not all of it is likely going to have ham to nibble on.

SOMETHING in the statistics, which may or may not be lies, also bothered me. And that is the mathematics.

For one, in the same months last year, agriculture posted what economists clinically refer to as a "negative growth rate."

That is the same as saying that your kid is growing backward. We know—something shrinking "shrinking growth".

Anyway, the point is that the amazing success in the past quarter, in reality, was aided by the lowest base figure for the comparative period in 2003.

And that was what Mark Twain meant about statistics being lies. What we had was not pure mathematical growth. We just saw a little mathematical magic.

In other words, we did not actually produce a lot of food. At least we don't have to worry about getting fat, finally.

* * *

WITH the good rice harvest in the past quarter, we will happen now to all those 1,000 or so persons which our good government is rated for rice importation.

I am not kidding. Our government issued all those 1,000 or so import permits. In return for what, is top secret figure out.

From what I gathered, all those who got the special favor from the government are nothing to get here this supply cost to the food.

I have bad news for you, compadre, because the 500 just suspended all importation of rice.

My sources said that the 500 council will likely meet in two weeks to decided whether or not to allow rice importation at all.

Since the government will likely chased down any importation, people can always resort to smuggling. Tax free yet!

* * *

As everybody knows, if this rice administration is good in one thing, it is in borrowing a lot of money abroad.

To raise the money for next year's elections, alas, the next year's budget, the government just issued some $250 million worth of bonds.

For interest rate, it got an amazing 250 points over Libor. Now this is not basketball. In bond floatation, 250 points may not be good.

Compare that rate with what the Ayala group got, for instance, for its dollar borrowings of 200 points over Libor.

Or even what San Miguel is likely going to get for its newest borrowings ($200 million) of only 180 points over Libor.

There—the government is not getting good rates on its borrowings. Why? I don't think the reason has anything to do with ability to pay.

The government can just impose taxes left and right to repay its debts, So, it's not the ability to repay. It's all about image.

You see, the banks buying these will is not going to sell them to investors. I don't think them in big demand for the government IOUs.

For one, nobody is falling for the trap of Gloriarroyo for a . . . well, "national reconciliation."

Shares close marginally higher

SHARE prices closed marginally higher yesterday in select buargain-hunting allowed the market to halt an extended slide, dealers said.

Buying interest was limited to SM Prime Holdings and Globe Telecom as political and security risk concerns continued to weigh on overall sentiment.

Dealers said investors remained jittery following a violent anti-government street protest in the Makati financial district on Wednesday.

Newspaper speculated yesterday that the march could be a prelude to another military attempt against President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who survived a mutiny in July.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index added 1.65 points or 0.12 percent to 1,341.33 after seven straight sessions of decline.

Gainers led losers 21 to 17, while 41 stocks were unchanged.

Turnover fell to 162.65 million shares while value rose to P922.99 million compared to 220.39 million shares worth P886.82 million.

In other words, we did not actually produce a lot of food. At least we don't have to worry about getting fat, finally.

* * *

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Maynilad . . .

From page 8a

delivery of water services to its consumers."

Bergonio said that Maynilad would also seek a clarification of the arbitrator's decision.

The terms and conditions of the concession agreement is unusual, had failed to take into account the financial impact of such a decision.

"In particular, Maynilad is seeking the arbitration panel to determine the impact of authorizing MWSS to draw on the performance bond to the light of the recommendation of the arbitration panel for the parties to seek extra-judicial solutions," he said.

Maynilad is saddled with about P350 million in debts, including those owed to foreign lenders like Citibank NA, Credit Lyonnais, Chase Manhattan, Credit Suisse First Boston and Commercial, Fonte Bank and KBC Bank NV.

Maynilad is 59 percent owned by Benpres, while about 29 percent is owned by Ondeo, a French utility then formerly known as Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux of France. It owns the rest was consisting of Manila, Pacific Ltd., Pilkas, Makalioy, Mantrichpa, Valenzuela, Hanvian, Pandayan, Bacoor, Kawit, Imus, Cavite City, Noveleta, Rosario and parts of Tagaig and Quezon City.

Office that has a negative effect on the economic viability of the concession," it explained.

"For instance, Maynilad is also asking the arbitration panel to consider the impact of authorizing MWSS to draw on the performance bond to the light of the recommendation of the arbitration panel for the parties to seek extra-judicial solutions," he said.

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DISCLOSURES

FINL, list of candidates for independent directors of **Ayalaland Bank** include Cielo Pilar, Jose Clemente and Felix Hernandez Jr.

* * *

MIC Holdings Inc. entered into a memorandum of agreement to acquire Solar Navigation and Tracking System's cellular-based application, Parasat Tracker and Unidirectional Tracker Asia; the latter will pay MIC 80 percent of revenues it generated from its Location Based Services offerings in SMART.

* * *

MEGAWIDE, Carlsberg & Absolute Inc. will have a special stockholders' meeting on Dec. 15, 3 p.m. at the Makati Ballroom A & B of Makati Shangri-La Hotel. Only stockholders of record as of Nov. 8 are entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting.

* * *

RECORD data of **Generalized Equipment Refinery Inc.** for pre-emptive rights offering of one right for every 2.5 shares held is on Dec. 4, 2010.

* * *

MAKILAND Corp. Corp. denied having any information that can explain the unusual price movement of its shares. *Compiled by Marissa B. Vetores, PDI Research*

CURRENCIES

December 11, 2010 Country	Unit	Peso Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.02240291	1.00000	44.63780
Japan	Yen	1.90193	0.00674	0.11769
United Kingdom	Pound	1.42424	1.00120	63.54100
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.17369	0.12900	7.72900
Switzerland	Franc	1.42139	0.71188	6.13900
Canada	Dollar	1.42939	0.98498	47.12000
Singapore	Dollar	1.48438	0.74139	33.20000
Australia	Dollar	1.42388	0.71989	32.00000
Bahrain	Dinar	1.20133	0.59700	26.65000
Brunei Darus	Dollar	1.42139	0.71188	31.80000
Brunei	Dollar	1.42139	0.71188	31.80000
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.0025	0.00013	0.06000
England	Pound	0.38	0.00000	0.00000
UAE	Dirham	0.00	0.00000	0.00000
Euro	Euro	1.42139	0.71188	44.00000
Argentina	Peso	0.25874	0.12960	5.76000
Brazil	Real	0.25874	0.12960	5.76000
Denmark	Krone	0.19448	0.09739	4.33000
Norway	Krone	0.17948	0.08989	3.99000
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.33633	0.16848	7.49000
Mexico	New Peso	0.18042	0.09035	4.02000
New Zealand	Dollar	1.42139	0.71188	31.80000
Norway	Krone	0.17948	0.08989	3.99000
Pakistan	Rupee	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000
Philippines	Peso	1.00000	0.50000	22.20000
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	0.26733	0.13388	5.95000
Sweden	Krona	0.19448	0.09739	4.33000
Taiwan	Dollar	0.71188	0.35650	15.85000
Thailand	Baht	0.71188	0.35650	15.85000
Vietnam	Dong	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000
Zambia	Kwacha	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000
Qatar	Riyal	0.26733	0.13388	5.95000
Kuwait	Dinar	3.89000	1.94800	86.60000
Oman	Rial	3.89000	1.94800	86.60000
Bahrain	Dinar	2.96000	1.48200	65.90000
Jordan	Dinar	3.16000	1.58200	70.30000
Lebanon	Pound	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000
Egypt	Pound	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000
Israel	Shekel	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.00000	0.00000	0.00000

Customs urged to address undervaluation of imported tires

By Michelle V. Rosero

THE FEDERATION of Philippine Industries has asked the Bureau of Customs to finally act on the complaint of local tire manufacturers against the alleged undervaluation of tires coming from Indonesia.

FPI president Arturo Acuzaza said in a statement that the Bureau of Customs' basis for the computation of the duties on Gajah Tunggal tires was no longer applicable. They were based on 1998 export prices, he said.

He added that the use of the 1998 price list was the reason the Customs Valuation Team earlier disregarded the transaction value declared by the importers of the said tire brand.

The same reason also prompted the Customs Valuation and Classification Review Committee (VCRC), another group in the BOC which is tasked to monitor valuation activities, to require importers of Indonesian tires to submit updated price lists endorsed by the Philippine commercial attaché in Indonesia.

In a recent meeting with Acuzaza, the Philippine attaché said he could not get enough information to validate the price of the Indonesian tires declared by the tire importers.

"The attaché said that top officials of Gajah Tunggal were always out of the office every time he would call to request for the list of current tire prices," he said.

Without the documents that could support allegations of undervaluation, the VCRC allowed the continued importation of the Indonesian tires using the alleged undervalued price.

Local tire manufacturers then appealed the decision of the VCRC. After six months of deliberation, the petition of local tire manufacturers for an upgrade of the valuation of the Indonesian tires was referred to the office of the Customs Commissioner Antonio Bernardo.

Acuzaza said, however, that the BOC chief has yet to come out with a decision on the local tire manufacturers' petition two years after the said petition was elevated to his office.

Acuzaza said the FPI was strongly supporting the petition of the local tire manufacturers because the domestic tire industry had already been severely harmed by the tariff competition brought about by cheap imports.

JANUARY TO OCTOBER

Gov't borrowings prop up BOP surplus to $160M

By Clarissa S. Batino

HEAVY borrowings by the national government and the central bank boosted the country's balance-of-payments position to a surplus of $942 million in October.

The October figure brought the 10-month BOP to a surplus of $158 million, from a deficit position in the first nine months.

The October BOP position reflected a big improvement from a deficit of $109 million a year ago, although the 10-month surplus was 81 percent lower than the $842 million registered in the same period last year.

In the first nine months, the external payments posted a deficit of $783 million.

A BOP surplus should help improve the peso as it indicated that the inflow of dollars were greater than the funds leaving the country.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Deputy Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. said the surplus was due to the borrowings of the government and the BSP.

The central bank borrowed $505 million worth of three-year funds from a syndicate of more than 20 banks while the government issued $1.05 billion worth of 10-year and 25-year global bonds last month.

"While the account breakdown is not yet available, we know that the national government and the BSP went to the bond and loan markets during the month. This helped the BOP," said Tetangco in an interview.

Closely watched by investors, the BOP indicates the country's ability to settle its obligations. It is influenced by two major accounts, which reflects the movement in trade, and the capital and financial account, which mirrors the flow of investment and borrowings.

The BOP position is calculated using two indicators—net international reserves and revaluation of gold.

This year, the BSP estimated that the BOP deficit would reach $1.31 billion while the current account would yield a surplus of $2.7 billion. For 2004, the BSP is expecting the BOP to hit a surplus of $1.7 billion and the current account surplus to drop to $1.3 billion.

The revised outlook for 2004 was based on expectations that exports would grow by 19 percent and imports by 21 percent from last year's 3 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

The central bank is counting on government borrowings and a solid growth in exports to help boost the dollar reserves as well as the external payments position.

While the government had reduced its external borrowings this year by $500 million to only $1.8 billion, it had pre-funded about $1 billion of its $1.8-billion funding requirement for next year.

AEV keen on Transco subtransmission lines

By Russell W. Clemings

ABOITIZ Equity Ventures Inc. is planning to buy power substransmission lines and a mini-hydro generation complex that are up for privatization in boost the firm's power business.

Antonio L. Bonifacio, AEV executive vice president and chief operating officer, said in an interview that the company was interested in two to three subtransmission lines in Pampanga and Davao City.

The Energy Regulatory Commission last month approved the guidelines governing the privatization of National Transmission Corp.'s subtransmission assets.

Transco hopes to raise P6 billion from the sale of these assets.

The lines that are used to deliver electricity from power generators to distribution utilities are called transmission assets, while those used to get power from the utilities to end-users are classified as sub-transmission assets.

"We are hoping to get those located in our franchise areas in Pampanga and Davao since we are the only one using them (lines)," Aboitiz said.

The Aboitiz group owns 43.6 percent of the San Fernando Electric Light and Power Co. in Pampanga and 99.91 percent of Davao Light and Power Co. Inc.

Also, the official said AEV was planning to buy National Power Corp.'s Talomo mini-hydro complex in Davao City, which started operations in the late 1950s.

The government plans to sell early next year the four-unit Talomo complex, which has a total capacity of 3.5 MW.

AEV subsidiary Hydro Electric Development Corp. currently has seven mini-hydro plants in Benguet and one in Davao.

SMC to pick banks for loan worth $300M

SAN MIGUEL Corp., Southeast Asia's largest food and beverage group, has asked a group of eight banks to arrange a $200-$300-million, five-year loan, debt market sources said.

Bankers did not yet know the purpose of the loan and said it could be for general working capital, capital expenditures or even for the buyout of a company, the sources said.

San Miguel has been looking to expand into Australia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, it said.

The eight banks are ABN Amro Bank, BNP Paribas, Citigroup, HSBC, ING Bank, JPMorgan, Standard Chartered Bank and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp.

Bank Notes said if all eight banks could get credit approval to underwrite the deal at San Miguel's requested terms, a formal mandate would be awarded as early as next week.

All of the banks were said to have strong relationships with the borrower.

San Miguel has in recent years aggressively expanded its business through buyouts. Since 2000, it has bought J. Noy & Son, Sapporibeer Beverage Corp., Ever Foods Corp., Coca-Cola Bottlers Philippines Inc. and Canmen Bottling Corp. Reuters

End to gin row sought

A CONSUMER group has called for the speedy resolution of the gin branding controversy amid concerns over the slow progress of the case.

The Isabela-based Tanggapang Mamimili Incorporated made the call before the Mandaluyong Regional Trial Court (RTC) wanting that "attempts to delay the case might constrain us to prematurely make our conclusion on the issue."

Consumer activist spirit Tanggapang spokesperson Shirley Nicacio issued the statement by the wake of the recent issuance of a temporary restraining order (TRO) by the Court of Appeals (CA) against the Mandaluyong RTC judge hearing the P4.8-million suit filed by Ginebra San Miguel Inc. (GSMI) versus TSI for alleged trademark infringement and unfair competition.

The TRO was issued upon the petition of TSI to stop the lower court from implementing a preliminary injunction issued against TSI. The TRO also directed GSMI to comment on the petition and TSI's application for Preliminary Injunction.

Foreign investors warned against political risks in RP

SHELTER Capital has warned investors against lingering political risks in the Philippines aggravated by speculations that the government would resort to full-year deficit-target slant in pre-election spending.

"For the first time since March 2003, we are adopting an underweight position for Philippine credits. We believe Philippine sovereign credits are vulnerable to increased negative risk going forward, much of it politically driven," said Barclays in its November research update.

BSBC, in its review for the month, also noted that Philippine bonds and local currency were being adversely affected due to negative reports, particularly those that demeaned the President Macapagal-Arroyo's chances of winning in the 2004 elections.

"Although the President's decision to seek re-election has eased anxiety, the market remained unconvinced about her ability to win the May presidential election," said BSBC in its monthly emerging markets bulletin called The View.

The investment banks pointed to the administration's corruption-stained image in view of controversies involving her husband, persistent rumors of a military uprising, the unresolved peace and order in the South, and the strong contenders, including actor Fernando Poe Jr., as the factors that affect the chances of the President to win.

Sovereign bond prices have widened since the July 27 mutiny while the peso remained the poorest performer in the region since the start of the year.

Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho said the spreads on the 10-year global bond, for instance, had widened to more than four percentage points following the impeachment case against Davide.

A month ago when the government sold 1.8 year bonds, the spread was only at 3.5 points over benchmark US Treasuries. The recent $220 million, three-year bond issue carried a spread of 3.777 points.

"After a stabilization of government finances during the first eight months of the year, developments on revenue collection and increased spending discipline, signs of fiscal upsurge are appearing as budgetary windfalls are being used for pre-presidential election fiscal pump-priming," noted Barclays.

Bathroom fixtures maker eyes big jump in exports

By Michelle V. Rono

HOCHENG Philippines Corp., manufacturer and distributor of KOC brand of bathroom fixtures, has generated $500 million in export sales in the first 18 months of the year, making it the country's No. 1 exporter of these products.

The figure was 30 percent higher than the $250 million recorded in the same period last year.

Hocheng assistance vice president Sun Lu said the significantly higher export figure was attributed to the increasing confidence of foreign buyers in the brand.

"The Filipinos' creativity and excellent craftsmanship are among the backbones of the HOC brand," said Lu during the company's product presentation yesterday at the World Trade Center.

The company official also said Hocheng was tapping more markets for its products to be able to sustain growth in exports.

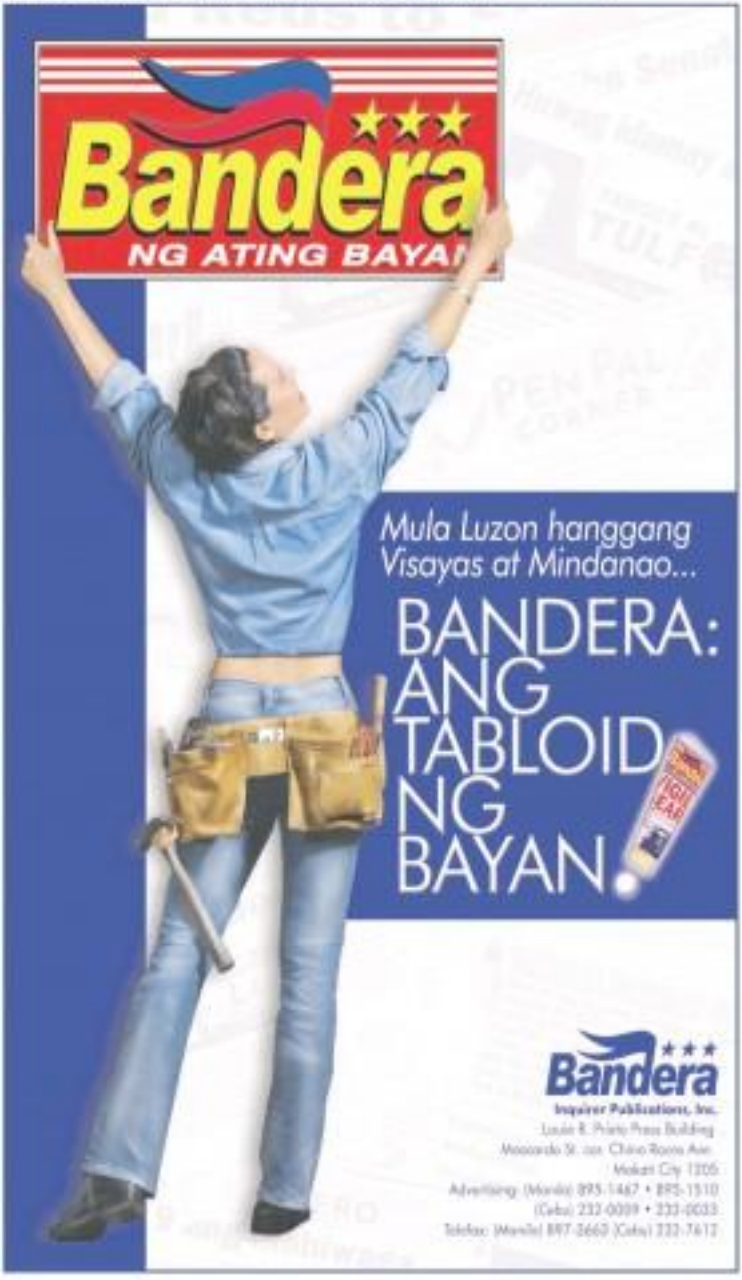
"We want to expand to every corners of the world and share the kind of quality that Philippines can produce," said Lu.

Hocheng now exports current markets abroad include Taiwan, Japan, Korea, India, Kuwait and Lebanon—earmarks 80 percent of its production for exports.

Lu said the company, which has 2000 nationals nationwide, was also expecting an increase in annual domestic sales following the introduction of its latest products, such as the LX series.

Aside from the 82 series, Hocheng produces various bathroom product lines, including Jupiter, Legion and Legend.

Hocheng, an ISO-certified firm, recently started the $5-million expansion of its manufacturing facility at the First Cavite Industrial Estates in Rosario, Cavite. The project is expected to be completed in April 2004.



Quota-free system worries garment sector

A WARD-UP poll has been sounded over the fate of the country's garment industry in the advent of a quota-free world economy.

In a speech before the recent 2nd MAP CEO International Conference held at the Makati Shangri-la Hotel, Bernadine Siy chair of Bench-clothe apparel Inc. (BENCH), said that "while we are preoccupied with seemingly endless stream of crises, a far greater crisis has been apparently silently creeping from national consciousness."

Siy referred to the expiration of the World Trade Organization-initiated Agreement on Textile and Clothing (ATC) on Jan. 1, 2005.

This development, Siy stressed, might lead to the demise of the clothe-manufacturing garment industry, which for 30 years has not only significantly helped our economy but also provided steady employment to over 400,000 workers, and livelihood to their families.

The industry contributes $3 billion or 6 percent of the country's total export earnings yearly.

Siy said that we appeal for the industry and government to draw tasks and immediately find solutions to the problem.

"The government should convene a knowledgeable ad hoc multi-sectoral body and, among other measures, initiate an WTO Free Trade Agreement to ensure growth and creates and market access for exports," she proposed.

Siy said the development should not be viewed as a doomsday scenario but as an upbeat challenge for staggering growth.

The 38-the executive noted that while the industry has only a few good cards in its favor, "those cards, if played right, can be a good platform in its transition the industry into a winner in the new environment."

Among these cards, she said, were the industry's 1,000 companies and owners with solid experience and experience in the business, about half-a-million highly skilled workers, long-standing relationships with customers and suppliers worldwide and an efficient work ethic tinctured with strict business processes.

Equally important, she added, was the last-machine need for the industry to seek out new lucrative foreign markets and bolster local garment production.

GOINGS-ON

No. 1 underwriter

DEUTSCHE Bank, Europe's second-biggest bank by assets, has continued to expand its global platform to maintain its No. 1 underwriter of international bonds for the first time in the third quarter of 2003. According to data compiled by Bloomberg, Deutsche Bank has underwritten international bonds amounting to $47.251 billion in the third quarter this year, ahead of Citigroup which underwrote $45.728 billion in the same period.

Deutsche Bank's 1.01 dollar bond bookrunner has continued to make tremendous strides, largely due to its extensive investment by the firm in trading, sales and research expertise. Market share has risen steadily to dominate tables in 22 Debt from this 1 to 2000 to No. 1 this year.

Carlos Cruz, chief country officer for Deutsche Bank in the Philippines, said this growth "reflects the LA Euromoney 69 borrowers have in Deutsche Bank's ability to place US dollar denominated bonds."

Leadership confab at AIM

THE INTERNATIONAL Movement of Development Managers (MDM), a professional network composed of graduates of the Asian Institute of Management programs, is convening a national leadership conference with the theme "Building a Community of Leaders and Organizations Through Good Governance."

The conference will be held on Dec. 1-2 and 2 at the AIM Conference Center, said conference chair Henry S. Sy and program director Jesus Antonio C. Garcia.

Among the plenary speakers are Dr. Federico M. Macaranas, dean of the AIM Center for Development Management; Edward J. Pereira, president of the Management Association of the Philippines (PMAP); Edgardo R. Lacson, president, Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines (Finex); Ernesto B. De Guzman, president of Cebu Pacific Movement; Jeremy Orr, managing director of Philippine Shell Exploration; and Cesario T. Jimenez, MDM president.

The three-day conference-workshop series also aims at generating a collective effort in solving problems, exchange best practices and tools in projects and program management.

Business sector's anger unlikely to bring change

CONGRESS has been in the works to tackle economic problems—a bloated budget deficit, outdated tax rules and a corruption-riddled bureaucracy.

And that's where the proposed laws will stay for the foreseeable future, in a Congress that has passed a record low number of laws as it has locked horns over alleged scandals.

Public opinion is split on whether to impeach the nation's top judge while the peso nears all time lows and government bonds slide. Many investors are taking their cash elsewhere.

The political noise is blamed on pre-election jostling but business people don't see an improvement even after voters choose a president in May next year.

"We are more than dismayed. We are outraged by this whole thing," Guillermo Luz, the head of the Makati Business Club, told Reuters.

"We see this as an abuse of power."

Instead of tax policy initiatives, the buzz in Congress is about "high-crimes," politicians trying to convince colleagues to withdraw an allegation that Supreme Court Chief Justice Hilario Davide misused court funds.

The military is on red alert for destabilization attempts and the run-up to elections in May is shaping up to be a long circus.

No changes seen

Few believe the anger among business people will translate into change in May's elections—as they cast around for a business-friendly candidate in the mould of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Boosted by Thaksin's spending programs, Thailand has left the Philippines trailing as it combines political stability with high growth rates and a strengthening currency.

Eduardo Cojuangco, the chair of beer and food conglomerate San Miguel Corp., is reportedly tired as a potential business-friendly candidate, but he has said he would run.

Cojuangco heads the Nationalist People's Coalition party, which officially backs President Gloria Arroyo's government but has crossed the president by leading the impeachment move against Davide.

San Miguel Corp. has last several Supreme Court cases.

Young Congressmen from rich families have protected the impeachment, rather than addressing other matters, a fact that fits one theory of why Philippine politicians do so little to improve the lot of the nation's 82 million people.

Many argue the elite few hundred families that dominate the country have limited interest in reforms to open up their businesses to competition or to plug holes in a leaky tax system.

Logic lost?

Personal vendettas, old grudges and ambitions seem to take precedence over the national interest, as the peso nears a record low of 56.75 to a dollar.

That low was hit in January 2001 when people power ousted President Joseph Estrada over the jueteng payoffs scandal.

"That's the sad part about it—these people are not thinking of their country but of their own futures," said Peter Wallace, head of a business consultancy in Manila, referring to those pushing for Davide's ouster.

Others have given up on logical explanations.

"I'm not sure what their reasons are any more," said Luz.

Investors vote with their wallets. Foreign direct investment in the second quarter was down 73 percent on a year earlier.

Spreads on Philippine government bonds, the premium over US Treasuries that show investors' assessments of risk, have blown out. When the impeachment vote erupted last month the spread on 2014 bonds jumped 0.75 percentage point, although it has since regained half the lost ground.

Nil confidence

A survey of business leaders by Walbert's consultancy found confidence in politicians had sunk to almost zero even before the impeachment row.

Of 61 chief executives, half thought Congress was doing a terrible job, with 32 percent saying its performance was poor.

Nobody rated the Congress even as well as "fair."

One bill negotiating in Congress aims at overhauling the main tax agency which fails to collect around P220 billion in revenue every year, largely due to evasion and corruption.

Other proposed laws should also help improve the tax take and rein in a government deficit now hitting P200 billion this year.

Asia's largest sovereign debt issuer outside Japan, the Philippines owes around $57 billion, 70 percent of annual GDP.

"We are facing a potentially very serious situation on the budget deficit and the public sector debt," said Wallace.

"They are reaching quite critical levels....Items that in other countries have sidelined potential for a default."

Some voter hope for improvements after May's election. If Arroyo is re-elected, giving her a democratic mandate.

But investors are worried the poll could spring more nasty surprises. Among potential candidates are an ageing film star and a former police chief accused of murder.

Gerald Tee, the head of the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, said parties must stop backing candidates for their popularity with an thought to their experience.

"As a political party, you don't back candidates you know are not qualified," he said. "It's very insulting to the Philippine people."

Reuters

CONGRESS in session

Digitel taps Alcatel, Ericsson for expansion

By Abigail L. Ho

GOKONGWEI-OWNED Digital Mobile Philippines Inc. has awarded two contracts worth $158 million to telecommunications suppliers Alcatel and Ericsson to boost the number of its cell sites to more than 5,000 by next year.

Digitel Mobile chief executive Charles Lim said in an interview that with the completion of the first two phases of the company's network rollout by year's end, the switching of the Phase 3 contract would signal the doubling of its Sun Cellular brand's capacity and coverage in the coming months.

"Sun Cellular's 1800-1200 global system for mobile communications] network is currently operational and is providing coverage in key cities nationwide. The last rollout of phases 1 and 2 will be completed in 2005," he said.

The Equity Research arm of Credit Suisse First Boston stated in an Oct. 30 report that French telecommunications firm Alcatel would take care of network buildout in Luzon, while Ericsson's P1.3 billion deal would be responsible for the rollout in the Visayas and Mindanao areas.

The first two phases of Digital Mobile's network rollout entailed the establishment of 681 cell sites all over the country. These cell sites have a capacity of one million subscribers.

Phase 3 would increase this number to more than 1,300 and at the same time boost network capacity to accommodate about two million subscribers.

In an earlier interview, Digital Telecommunications Philippines Inc. chief finance officer Jaime Calonge said about half of the funding for the Phase 3 network would come from bank loans while the balance would be taken from its internally generated funds and suppliers' credit.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

SATURDAY Super

24 HOURS with Alice Peacock

By Orvino Castillo

SUPER! spents a whole day with Chicago-based alternative pop artist Alice Peacock when she came to Manila recently for a promo tour. "Blue," Peacock's new single which features Jon Mayer, is enjoying maximum rotation on you love stations, and for good reasons.

Her music is much like herself: honest, down-to-earth, intelligent, proud and happy. The pretty and talented singer/songwriter is also very humble and hardworking. Proof is how she breezed through these 24 hours known Alice Peacock as a Super! Trooper!

24 HOURS with Alice Peacock

9:00 a.m. Make Up Maiden

10 a.m. Big Lady Strategically parking for 7 gigs

10:15 a.m. Breakfast Queen, fueling up for a busy day

10:40 a.m. Media Maneuver. Hearing her single 'Alive' played on the radio

12 noon. Taping her TGIF Kiss-n-tell DVD

11 a.m. Greeting fans at MTV

4:30 p.m. Alice's live performance on the Podium seems to thrill delight other fans

12:33 p.m. Playing interviewing advice at MTV Hub

11:25 a.m. Alice on MOR. Getting ready to speak on MTV

11:45 a.m. Alice all wrapup

2:15 p.m. At the Power Plant mall, on the way to Chicken pound chick husband and manager Hugh Kahn

3:30 p.m. Dining it out with bandmembers Danny Hamm, Gig Strauss and Brian McDonald (PR)

3:55 p.m. Home Sweet Home...for now. Back at the hotel

3:55 p.m. "That's it!" Waiting on to see a paparazzi has "sex appeal" written all over it...literally

5:10 p.m. Flowers from Stephanie Barbie of Alice's Place

5:40 p.m. Fresh tattoo. Alice Peacock resting on her back

6:10 p.m. Autograph signing at G-Music Video, Ayutaya

4:30 p.m. Peacock and Power at the Podium

11:00 p.m. Ballad is Winning down the song list at Eastwood

12:30 a.m. A super sayre a super day! Goodbye, Super!

9:45 p.m. Doing her part. Alice Peacock at the AKOS Summit/Press Launch at Dan

12:47 a.m. Happy Endings after a great job on the All Newest at Eastwood

Smiles per hour

OUT THE WINDOW

Tata Diaz

From Sagada to Siargao, Capiz to Coron, Baler to Bohol, out-of-town trips are comic sketches from coast to coast.

I was once on a road trip around Luzon with a multinational crew of adventurous backpackers and kindred wandering spirits, when the two broads of our group had suddenly contracted spasms of infectious laughter. As they lulled for their Nikon shills, I craned my neck to look at what had set off their hellyaches. It was a sign that read: "Get high on God, and on drugs."

For me the best thing about traveling around the Philippines is the endless source of amusement unique to this part of the world. It is the kind of humorous pleasure you can't react to any comprehensive travel book because it's only found in the archives of traveler's memories, shared and edited over drinks and potluck among friends, enviably in the tradition of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales."

Comprehending the underlying humor and subtle humor in these tales requires a healthy dose of a cultural understanding, which is but natural if you're a homegrown, true-blue citizen of our beloved islands. My own restless wanderings have led to roles and encounters beyond those of mere sightseeing beaches, mountain ranges and snowfalls. From Sagada to Siargao, Capiz to Coron, Baler to Bohol, my fondest memories are not just triggered by the yellowing photos kept in the bible-thick scrapbook. What threatends my mental memory aside is crystal-clear recall are the shared anecdotes and journal scribbles that usually take me on a side-splitting laughtrip.

Everywhere, the signs

A big part of the Pinoy traveler's experience is encountering some of the road signs that range from the hilarious to the utterly bizarre. Just about every roadtrip memory I know has their own contribution of wacky wonders.

My absolute favorite of the lot is the one I once saw on the road to La Union, where there was a little motel that possibly proclaimed on its street board: "Night swimming offered 24 hours." Unless the proprietors have found a way to keep the rain from chasing travelers away, little lodge (in which case they should call the Ad Congress right now and tell all about their Big Idea), I wondered how this was possible, unless the place was manned by well, God.

This little was this little shop of horrors seen from a bus on the way to the Mountain Province that advertised, "Fantastic Birthday Party Balloons For Sale." The Freudenesque copywriter in me felt the urge to scribble a note to: "From words to reads, we names all your party needs!"

Other funky come-ons by extremely honest Pinoy entrepreneurs: "Wanted: GRO. At least magandá" and "38 Hights for sale. Medium to low."

Warning signs

Whether literally or downright hostile, the Pinoy has come up with some of the funniest, albeit extremely straightforward warning signs for travelers. Somewhere in Batangas, I remembered a sign outside a church that read: "Church Zone. Accident Prone Area." Perhaps it went beyond warning reckless drivers against shuffling the speedometer, as it could have been a statement on the global problem of warmart priests unable to control their inner human urges. Still on the subject of churches, I once happened upon one named "Our Lady of Ransom." To this day I am still pondering on its connotations, or whether it was kind of necessary for Ate Beyoncé members to belong.

In Kalibo, a sign at a commercial center read: "Chicks! Sorry for the inconvenience!" Ultra-feminists who balk at the derogatory term of 'chicks' should take comfort in the possibility that they were referring to the lady chickens at a nearby pen. Just a few meters away was yet another sensitive admonition: "Baboy mo, dalang mo."

Other road signs meant to tell the story? Derailed, yet fascinated only to compounding baffling Zen koans: "STOP" and "Take a moment." To my favorite misdemeanor of all is one I glimpsed on a weathered sizzling jeepney, which cryptically screamed, "Bowser ..."

Legendary

Every adventure always leaves me with a lineup of one to the utmost tales that I tell again and again, especially on those blah nights among people who need a break from painful small talk. At least my ex indulges.

After quitting my first job as features editor for a lifestyle magazine, I embarked on a two-week trip through the Visayas with a small group of core sisters. On the first few days, we caught the eye of a frank macho while on the middle of nowhere in Capiz. We parked ourselves in a small bar by an untainted beach, and decided to stay the night because of the surprisingly good selection of script playing (we the upstarters...from The Losers to Bob Marley. Getting to hit the next weather disruptive spatita, our divemaster called the watering-hole bartender over and requested, "Boss, Johnny Walker tapi, please!" Half an hour and the whole "Legend" CD intact, we still hadn't gotten our drinks, so I volunteered to follow up our little request. That's when I saw our drowned native doggedly flipping through the CD collection, looking for that elusive Johnny Walker album.

On that same trip, when the bad weather abated, we were to meet the mayor of that obscure little town to ask permission to explore the cave system underneath its mountain of the area. My eager companions asked if there was truth to the rumor that if you swam the whole length of the underground river, you'd end up in the open sea. The mayor vehemently replied, "Thus is not true! That is all bonicrap! But one thing is for sure – there are lizards in that cave! And a golden ship! I know for sure because my lolo was the leader of the faction." Needless to say, I choked on the free Coke. Cool blue the country!

Thus, in the spirit of adventure and in a bid to expand my collection of colorful memories, I continue to roam our islands as a wide-eyed newbie. Fittingly enough, when asses up my insatiable inner shopping mindset is a wee little on-line. I caught sermon on the mall of Gandaputo outlet in Sagada. It was a quote from Marie Corelli which screamed, "Nothing in life is to be feared, only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

(Email the author at tata_evangelista@yahoo.com)

This is only a test

. . . and the proper frame of mind is blank.

A STRANGE scene played out on the European stage recently. In far away Edinburgh, Beyoncé Knowles mimicked a computerized cocktails by dueling international Rockabilly scenes to her fourteen-time ass. The restriction might have made complete sense had she been in the company of the Pope, or back in medieval Japan. But for crying out loud, she was at the 2003 MTV Europe Awards! And this is the same woman who rose to fame through songs like "Bootylicious" and scored one pop culture 2004 with her head behind in the "Crazy in Love" video. As though speaking in code, she claimed she didn't want her posterior to be the center of attention during her performance. What, and ruin the intensive research and classy marketing strategy her record company dredged on to push sales through the roof? Separate demanding respect for her rump? What has civilization come to? Are we witnessing a new and improved sign of the apocalypse?

Living under the shadow of doom is interesting. I have pitfalls my eyes bloody with things I have read concerning the manic behavior of this thoroughly off-center species we call celebrities. I must apologize to my devoted hyper-intellectual readership—all three of them—because this week, I gave in like a punk and wrote something profoundly fluffy to illustrate this conclusion. Possibly a simple tour of blind terms leading the blind, confined aesthetics aren't involved here. When answering the 21 questions we aren't asking this week, the proper frame of mind is blank. Sin Cos Quiz this ain't but in this one, what's wrong is right, it not always correct and rarely bizarre.

21 questions

1) This pop sensation packs a ton of mouth in her pocket-size frame. She lately narrowed, "I look at Britney and I think 'My God, what happened?'"

a. Kylie Minogue
b. Christina Aguilera
c. Sophie Ellis-Bextor

2) Aside from questions regarding his retreading navel hair it that this new-married Latin hunk/Greek sports beanie hats to hide a budding head. Careful lighting on his eldest executive shadows across his chevron dome. One of his outfits even says he remembers his to wear a toupee. Who's about to give Lee Latchee a run for his dinero?

a. Marc Anthony
b. Ricky Martin
c. Enrique Iglesias

3) This tennis heartbreaker was the subject of incessant bullying in high school and was ordered arrested by older boys to make toast.

a. Andy Roddick
b. Pat Rafter
c. Tim Henman

4) Point of "Bootcut Politics" loses him an Harry Sesame but he also played punk bully Clint in the 1993 school's-out masterpiece "Toward and Confused."

a. Nicky Katt
b. Fyvush Finkel
c. Michael Rapaport

5) The father of this Ordinarian murdered his offspring's dog and left it on the doorstep with a memo that read "Don't Fcking scream with it in!"

a. Kelly
b. Ozzy
c. Dharma

6) Which celebrezants is closest to the Fantasy/Tommy Tongue? After spending a childhood addicted to "Beverly Hills, 90210," she's living out her "I'm a bigger hoyzenh than Brenda" dreams by stealing Shannen Doherty's husband Rick Johnson. His sideswept haircut was filmed riding bitch like a hack. Transcendey to tragic, indeed.

a. Lauren Bush
b. Elizabeth Jagger
c. Paris Hilton

7) To camouflage their normally flamboyant selves from obsessive fans and sneaky paparazzi, real-esque A-listers look into hotels under false names. A respected style icon and award-winning actress has been eluding the radar lately by signing up as Kate Fleming. Who is she?

a. Gwyneth Paltrow
b. Nicole Kidman
c. Cate Blanchett

8) She might as well leave and Barcelona during her next tour because this foxy rapper's name would stink in that part of the world. It means "The Turd" in Catalan.

a. Lil' Kim
b. Queen Latifah
c. Foxy Brown

9) Openly Latino superstar Ricky Martin is jumping on the ethnic music bandwagon. His about-to-be-released single "Bombamito" has an exotica-style production by Shirley Klein and Jaggy O. called what?

a. Bongo
b. Beethoven
c. Bhangra

10) Michael Jackson worked with this troubled r&b singer on his new single, "One More Chance." Dozens should wind up and issue restraining orders on the group duo since the comeback kid is being hailed as something "For the kids." Yikes.

a. Usher Raymond
b. Nate Dogg
c. R. Kelly

11) Despite being an ubiquitous as a Xanax addiction, the Neptunes declined to work on Britney's current over-hyped and underwooked album "In The Zone." Two years ago, Britney got "Boyz" and "I'm a Slave 4 U" only to default. Guy has Down'sed it on for someone else. Who's the simply-hoovered diva who turned the down-down?

a. Janet Jackson
b. Mariah Carey
c. Heather Headon

12) Probably puffing all his hairy dreadzone to good use, which sensitive rock frontman is releasing a poetry book appallingly called "Little Fluffy Clouds?"

a. Paul Dunn, Limp Bizkit
b. Dorrin Brimington, Goldie Pelt
c. Brandon Boyd, Incubus

13) Not to be outdone, this late-night talk show host also seeks to front the world with a book called "If Steel Bed Could Fly." This fascinating piece of literature is based on an actual event in this household, when a "rodenoite of bed" was ruined."

a. Jay Leno
b. David Letterman
c. Carson Daly

14) This Glasdexter spent 44 days in a box only to come out and discover that his hot German girlfriend is married to another man. Should we feel sorry, or simply ignore him?

a. Fatgloss@TheAbsolute
b. David Copperfield
c. David Blaine

15) A superfamous designer, who pulled up the cords from the coffin of this once-hated label, is quitting after his final A/W show in July 2004. He refused to relinquish control to Prijet-esque Bedouin. The ashes to not entirely bitter since the creative director in question will walk away with an obscene sum to trunks and eyebrow.

a. Marc Jacobs, Louis Vuitton
b. Tom Ford, Gucci
c. Hedi Slimane, Dior

16) This notoriously brain-free Simpson once introspected, "Tuna...is it a fish or a chicken?"

a. Jessica
b. Ed
c. Bun

17) She's just lost a part in the new Woody Allen movie due to tearaway problems, and seems set to make out playing her friend/ex Lorne's mother in a film about his life. Awkwardly, his ex-spouse doesn't think it's a good idea for her to play a druggie prostitute. Who's this '90s pooner plotz whose prescription-drug habit is costing her precious movie roles?

a. Alicia Silverstone
b. Drew Barrymore
c. Winona Ryder

18) This popular super-spy is shooting a recruitment video for the real-life CIA. Who could it be?

a. Frankie Muniz, "Agent Cody Banks"
b. Jennifer Garner, "Alias"
c. Mike Myers, "Austin Powers"

19) Her cracker nonchalancing her as "The Wonder," thanks to a fine output of hair-covering her face. This designer, accused of turning her ex-fiance into a T-shirt brand, is also allegedly pregnant.

a. Bonnie-lla Hynes
b. Tara Subkoff
c. Stella McCartney

20) Touted as "90210" for the Google generation, Fox's Jack TV series set in Southern California is jammed with good-looking kids, a hyperactive plot, and enough sun-lasers to make Aaron Spelling beam with pride. What's it called?

a. Dawsons
b. The OC (Orange County)
c. Sanchez Pensacosta

21) She's a pudgy dismay starlet who's known first as a crappy actress and next as a crappy singer. All bunny ears with nothing in between, she also has a little dog aptly named, er, "Little Dog."

a. Raven Simone
b. Hilary Duff
c. Jo O'Meara, formerly of S Club

Age against the machine

Gino de la Paz

SATURDAY Super

Behind the sins

COMMERCIAL MUSE (NO): The four hot honors hides one friends

THE GURU: When using all your stakes, focus from the corner within

Shooting four certified hotties at the mall, on a helipad, and at a gas station where unstoppable usis clambered up a forklift for a free show.

By Jessica Soi

Producing a calendar is like a box of chocolates ... laced with surprises. You never know what's gonna explode in your face. It could be a light fuse, the weather, flight delays...it could be...Jayzeey forbid...the sales.

The success of the 2002 Sexiest da Kinni calendar by FHM Philippines pumped up the pressure for the following year. So we at FHM went for sex sex, but three points: girls. With Mina, Aubrey, and Diana, we flew to the tropical paradise that is Bohol where, for days, at 6 a.m. sharp we would be off to some beach, cave, forest, or waterfall, minus of toilets to plug in for electric power, and whether or not the sun would go hurt on us.

As the last quarter of 2003 rolled in, another question kicked in: "Who's next?" Now we have the answer.

This latest FHM calendar serves up a quartet of certified hotties. There's calendar vet Diana Z again; Juliana, the girl with legs that go all the way to her lapels; sweet and bubbly Miles Ocampo; Myles, and Francine, the towering Chinese-Thai sculpture.

Wicked idea

Since the white-and-wind bathing suit has become a cliché, someone pitched what if, instead of bathing in some exotic locale, we shot right in the city? In photographer Randy Aquino' words, "Skin City." Editor-in-chief Eric Ramos threw in the unifying factor: "Babes in Bikinis."

It was a wicked idea.

The first shoot was at Robinsons Galleria. Pint-sized Juana, set loud Myles and Francine in various states of undress without the benefit of Our MCP's entire male population drooling over our curls. Next stop: we were set to do Juliana on a helipad, with an ice cream cart. But logistic issues clouds let loose a downpour, and we had to reschedule. On the new date, the sun decided to sulk/play.

ROCK N' ROLLERS: This is how they look before the shoot.

PAUL HOFFMAN: Dawit ang sabit dito.

DAVID: Ang pa sa amoga.

HAEDEN BAIL TRANSIT: Before (above), and after (down)—care for a ride?

Behind the sins

From page C2

HERE COME THE GHOSTS. All undressed in...

The other shooting days were no more or less raucously, despite the requisite sights. Speaking of requisites ... Siri had to see to a thai-style hut for supper, Disnehel insisted for lunch, Juliana had ice cream and cake after dinner, and Francine was comfortably ensured all the time (she gave the guys a complex with her T-[ ] Frame).

One standout shoot was Diana's at a gas station. We cordoned off the area and even had an oil tanker park in front to block the view of onlookers who had started chatting rooftops and blender-jeans. And just when we thought we had a Pinoying Just-a-pool hit, as assistant said, "Um, uh, they have schedules."

That was to say, a batch featuring upcoming Pinoy cuts. Talk about surreal.

Boracay goes Italian

THE DISTINCTIVE aroma of olive oil, seafoods and Feta cheese wafts in the air with the tropical breeze beckoning visitors to sit down and relax for a hearty meal.

The cooking can very well be mistaken for that of Mediterranean Italy. But the restaurant is much closer to home—Aria Cucina Mediterranean, on the island paradise of Boracay.

Aria's kitchen is the domain of Gino Almedio where he diligently whips out classic signature dishes from coastal Italy that have hooked many first-timers, turning them into regular patrons.

One gives them good reason why a visit to Aria should be a part of every Boracay excursion. "The location, the ambiance, and of course the cuisine."

Aria sits along the beachfront in D' Mall, D' Boracay, right at the heart of the island's commercial district. Easily accessible to shoppers and beach strollers, the easy, airy interiors designed by Ed Cancheda lets comfy tropical Boracay grace its lounge and lays around for an extended breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Among the culinary delights that have kept people coming back in to have more are Cioppino and Alla Greca, sautéed prawns with feta cheese, tomato, and basil; Carciofolo D' Angello Alla Fiora Mentra, grilled lamb with rosemary flavor; and Delizia Al Forno, baked chicken with garlic and rosemary.

In order to entice patrons all year around, Gino constantly experiments in creating up to four or more new dishes every week. An indispensable aid for Gino in creating genuine pizzas is the authentic handmade wood-fired oven that was built in the Aria kitchen by Italian chef Giuseppe Grassi. It is one of only two such ovens used in the country today.

Handmade wood-fired ovens, which are widely used in Italy until today, cook the pizza from the top as opposed to conventional ovens wherein the cooking heat comes from the bottom.

When craving pastas and main dishes together, Gino sticks mostly to herbs, vegetables, capers, anchovies, seafood and olive oil. These raw materials are the basic building blocks of the cuisine abundantly available in the coastal Mediterranean regions of Italy as well as Boracay.

Aria is the brainchild of cuchi executive Jose Elizalde in partnership with Paolo Ortiz-Luis, an 18-year veteran in the restaurant business. Given the island food and beverage makeup of the Boracay population, these entrepreneurs recognized an opportunity to extend customers through authentic Italian dishes.

"The ultimate goal of Aria is to deliver the highest quality Italian-Mediterranean cuisine on the island of Boracay while keeping our prices reasonable and competitive with all established on the beachfront," Elizalde concludes.

SILVER THAN BLUE: Drink your blues away at Aria in Boracay.

Café With A View

CAFÉ del Sol, the newest coffee shop to open in Boracay, gives people a whole new reason to go to the beach.

People flock to the island getaway to escape the cramped crowds of the urban jungle. Now they have the freedom to enjoy the sun and sea, and have their coffee too. Café del Sol serves up world-class Italian brews, from espresso to brewed coffee, cream frappe and coffee frappe in a cozy ambiance just like the coffee shops in the big cities minus the annoying sight of traffic outside.

Coffee lovers are treated to a spectacular view of pristine white beaches, coconut trees swaying in the breeze, people strolling on the sand and the golden glow of the Boracay sunset.

That alone allows people to sit back and chill out with friends after a day at the beach or the mall.

TOMMY FOR YOU: Get wet with this coffee concoction.

Diners can enjoy a wide variety of Swiss confections and freshly baked cakes and pastries to go with their coffee. For the non-coffee addicts, there are relaxing tea infusions and fresh fruit juices.

Café del Sol is located along the beachfront at D'Mall in Boracay.

BITE ME! I'm all yours.

FAAH: Elizalde's leaves away from home.

SATURDAY Supar

SuperFriends By Tess Tiu
Photos by Joan Bitagcol

The fairest of 'em all

The scene: Prince of Jaipur at The Fort. The cast: The MTV Inside reality Best Model of the World contestants. The roommates' director Bobbie Carmona with supermodel and photographer Joan Bitagcol.

Quite a way, read it down.

Wanna join our fold? E-mail us with a few lines about yourself, add your photos and send it to supar@inquirer.com.ph.

We'll be waiting.

fashion en force!

Top mannequin Joan Blagcol, in her first exclusive shoot with Supper, poses her time at 24 model hopefuls for the upcoming 'MTV Fashionista Best Model Of The World' finals

DIVA QUEENS Chocolate is waiting on the background at the beach of Alaya in the East.

MEN AT WORK Men are no one woman—or go down into your pick.

"My values is to see the fashion scene on the world," says Joan Blagcol, "especially Philippines Best Model Search" for the third straight year.

For months, Blagcol and his crew were around metro, Manila and other provinces for the search of candidates that will be on the finals. These 24 hopefuls are set for the finals. Blagcol is a fashion business and [illegible] Blagcol is a fashion business and [illegible] Blagcol is a fashion business and [illegible]